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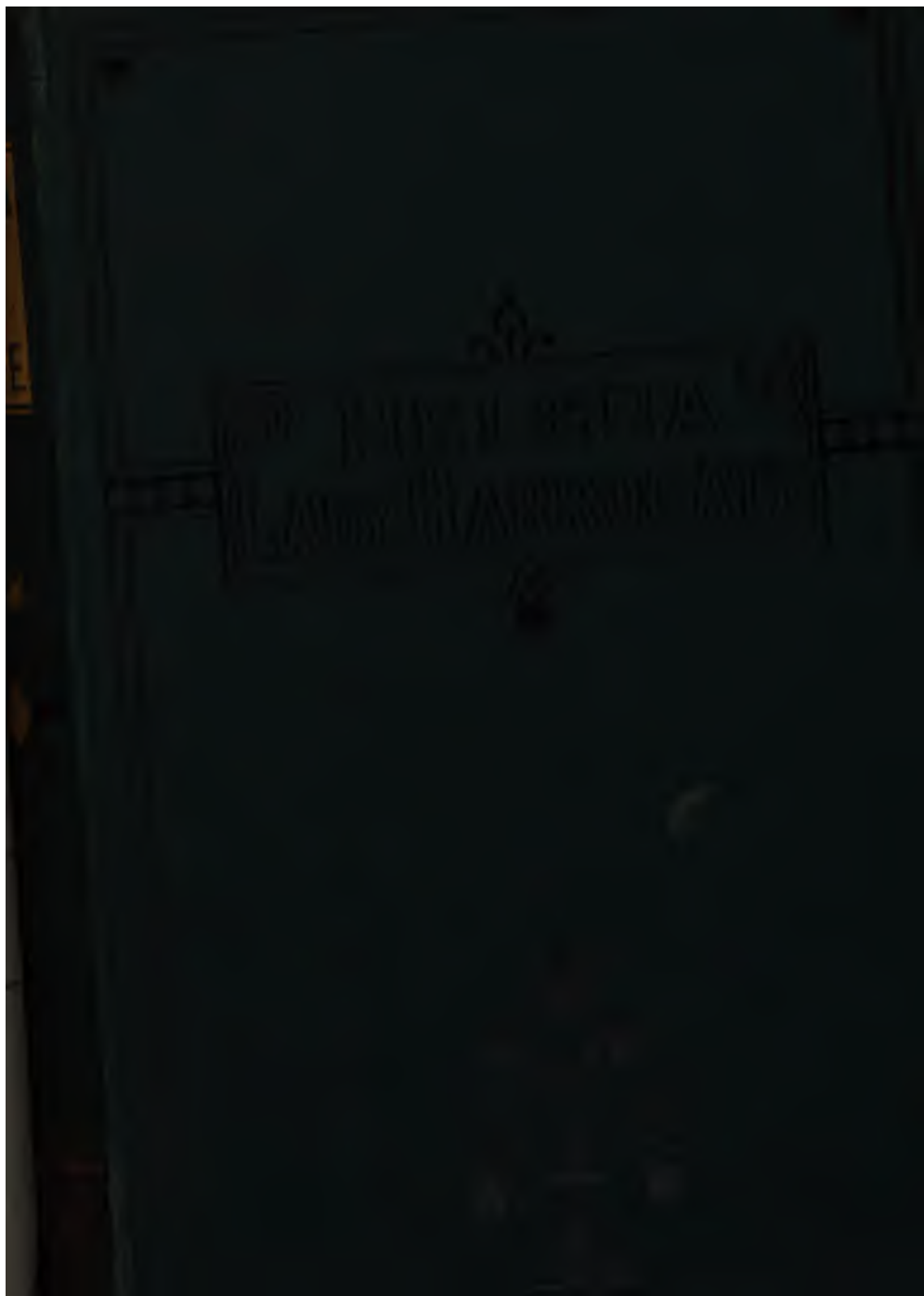
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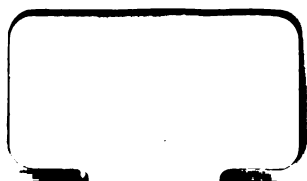
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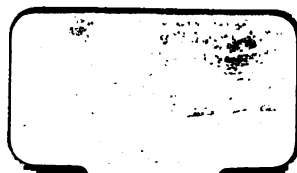
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HELENA
LADY HARROGATE



HELENA LADY HARROGATE

A Tale

BY
JOHN BERWICK HARWOOD

AUTHOR OF 'LADY FLAVIA'

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. III



LONDON
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HELENA, LADY HARROGATE.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNUSUAL RECEPTION.

THAT river-side locality of which Plugger's boarding-house is an ornament did not present a very cheerful aspect on the lowering afternoon of an autumn day, as Lord Harrogate alighted from the cab in which he had been conveyed from the West End to that far eastern suburb wherein was situated Dampier's Row. The sky, draped with leaden-coloured clouds, looked sullenly down upon the leaden-coloured surface of the Thames; and the wind moaned among the

ship-breakers' wharfs, and the marshy fields where huge old anchors red with rust, and worn-out boilers and crumpled sheets of battered iron lay neglected; and the lazy fog crept along the weedy banks, and curled above the slimy creeks that narrowed as they ran inland.

There were some hours of daylight left; for Lord Harrogate had judged it better to pay some attention to the well-meant warning of Inspector Drew, not to call at 'the captain's' boarding-house after sunset. Arrived in sight of Dampier's Row at last, he recognised the now familiar name of Plugger on the dented brass plate. He rang the bell; and in response to its clangour there appeared at the door a white woolly head, partially covered by a striped night -

cap of gay-coloured wool, rakishly set on, a pair of small gold ear-rings such as foreign sailors often wear, and a wrinkled dusky face, the original black of which had faded, as often happens with negroes who have spent many years in temperate latitudes, to a nondescript brown.

“What is there for the service of Monsieur?” asked the sable janitor of Plugger’s, speaking slowly and with a pronounced French accent, and carrying his hand in military style to his striped nightcap as he spoke.

“I wish to see a Mr. Hold,” returned Lord Harrogate, “who is, I believe, staying here.”

“Ah ! ze capitaine !” smilingly rejoined the old negro, who may very probably have

been a ship's cook, and as probably a French-speaking black from Guadaloupe or Martinique. "Yais; he sall be in. Most of our gentlemans be out though, at dis hour. Ha! Pompey! Nigger! Steward! Your business to attend door, and I leave my kitchen and my *casseroles* to do your work for you."

A slim mulatto youth, in a pantry jacket of striped cotton, appeared in answer to this appeal.

"Cap'en Hold?" he said dubiously, on hearing the name of the person in request. "Him in for sure, but dis child no savvey for certain whether him best please to be disturb now."

Half-a-crown decided Pompey the steward to conduct the visitor to the presence of the redoubtable Richard; and accordingly he

ushered Lord Harrogate along a passage obstructed by pails, dilapidated furniture, and empty hampers, and up a narrow staircase, at the top of which was a door on which a blue anchor—attached to which, in once bright festoons, was a gilded cable—had been painted.

“Is Mr.—or Captain—Hold asleep, or what?” asked Lord Harrogate in an undertone, noticing that Pompey hesitated to knock at the door or to turn the handle.

“No, Massa!” whispered the mulatto, rolling his expressive eyes towards the unseen occupants of the room. “On’y dey mortal short-tempered sometimes, after carouse. Dey on spree now—one, two, tree days and nights, four of our cap’ens, and most time to leave off. Suppose dis de

finish. Sleep to-night. Wash to-morrow, and sober."

Lord Harrogate began to doubt whether he did wisely in seeking an interview with a man of Hold's character, who had been, as he gathered from the steward's words, engaged in a drinking-bout of Gargantuan dimensions. But he reflected that what he sought for was the truth, and that the buccaneer in his cups was more likely to prove communicative than at another time.

"Is this a private room?" asked Lord Harrogate in a low voice.

The dark youth shook his head. "We keep Blue Anchor," he said, with somewhat of that childish vanity which goes along with African blood, "express for genelman dat want to go on spree. No 'stablishment

longshore here got same 'commodation to offer to genelman. Massa like to go in now?"

And as Lord Harrogate assented, the mulatto gently opened the door just wide enough to give admission to the visitor, over whose shoulder he stood on tiptoe to peer cautiously.

"Hollo! Pompey, you yellow-skinned rascal! what d'ye mean by turning strangers into our cuddy?" hailed a hoarse voice, as copper-visaged Captain Grincher brought his parboiled eyes and bushy white eyebrows and grim mouth to bear on the intruders. "Since when can't officers finish off their grog comfortable?"

The fierce old kidnapper had snatched from the table a heavy stoneware jug that

once had held hot water, and this he was in the act of hurling at the mulatto steward, who ducked promptly, to avoid it, when his angry eyes met the steady gaze of the visitor, and he paused.

“I have not the least wish to intrude upon you, sir,” said Lord Harrogate slowly and with a bow ; “and I beg to apologise for any want of courtesy in the fashion of my entering here. My only desire is to have a few minutes’ conversation with a member of your company, Captain Hold, whom I have met with before.”

This unexpected politeness produced an effect on Captain Grincher which probably astonished that veteran evil-doer. He reeled up from his chair and made a clumsy bow, as a white bear, after a course of

education from some travelling showman, might have done.

“You’re welcome, shipmet, to the Blue Anchor!” said Captain Grincher, more hoarsely than when his husky voice had been raised in menace. “Any friend of Dick Hold—see, Dick the lubber, isn’t ready to answer to his name—is free of quarter-deck and cabin.—Steward, a chair for the gentleman passenger. Bustle there!—And now, mister, put a name to it. Here’s whisky; here’s the French brandy we used to run in when first I learned to haul a rope; here’s peach-stuff from Baltimore; and this”—grasping a jar that stood upon the table, among shattered tobacco-pipes, sodden pools of liquor, dirty glasses, jugs, empty bottles, and lemon-

peel—"is the good Jamaica, the king's allowance, as we called it forty year ago, that beats the lot of 'em."

That Captain Grincher, after his long vigil, was but slightly intoxicated at that moment, was tolerably clear. But Lord Harrogate's chief interest was in the other members of the group, one of whom, snoring heavily, reclined on a horse-hair sofa ; while a second, of spare form and with long dark hair tossed wildly to and fro, was rocking himself slowly and with a low crooning cry in his chair ; and a third crouched, leaning on the table, his head buried between his arms.

"Hillo! Dick! rouse up!" shouted Captain Grincher, employing his two hands as an improvised speaking-trumpet. — "And

you Sam, avast that whimpering noise, like a sick hound in the moonshine, Cuba-way."

With the perversity of an intoxicated man, the person addressed, and who, as he rocked himself to and fro, had kept up but a low moaning cry, now burst out shrilly: "Keep them off! Kill them! Don't let them gibber at a white man like that, with their ugly black faces and grinning ivories. Only a lot of niggers, warn't they? Answer me that, you precious partners, that don't stir a finger to beat back the pack of them from me!"

"Wouldn't you say," remarked old Captain Grincher with infinite disgust, "that a fellow who can let a set of niggers—rubbed out in Texas years and years ago, when he was outlawed after the war, and the

slaves were set free and given lands—weigh upon him that way, wasn't fit to handle a ship in dirty weather? Yet when he hasn't got too much of the Bourbon aboard, Sam Barks is a man. 'Tis in the education of him, ye see—coming of chapel-going parents—the difference lies! I'm of the old breed. Blacks, live or dead, don't trouble *me*, although more than once, in the South Seas, I've"——

"Ware, mate!" interrupted the deep voice of Richard Hold, as that reputable person lifted his haggard head, which had hitherto been pillowed on his arms, and looked around him with a dawning intelligence in his bloodshot eyes. "You oughter know by this, what tales it's best not to tell out of school."

Captain Grincher, though he took the advice in dudgeon, so far profited by it as to abstain from any definite statement as to his Polynesian experiences.

“You remember me, Mr. Hold?” said Lord Harrogate, as he saw the light of recognition kindle in Richard’s red eyes, as they blinkingly scanned the face of the visitor. The master-mariner did not immediately reply, but for some thirty seconds or so he stared at Lord Harrogate with the dull menace which we may often note in the glaring eyes of an over-driven ox. Then, with shaking hand, he clutched a bottle at his elbow, and pouring out a glassful of the fiery spirit which it contained, tossed it off as if it had been pure water, and then, with a hand that shook

no more, replenished the glass and drank a portion of its contents. He was evidently by a great effort of the will shaking off, as hardened toppers can sometimes do, the effects of the debauch.

"I have come," pursued Lord Harrogate, "just to talk over with you, if you are willing, the matter on which you spoke to me at the bivouac in Woolmer Forest. If another time or place would"—

"No! confound it, no!" broke in Hold huskily, but coherently enough. "I talked, I'm afraid, sad rubbish when I beat up your quarters, and I ask your pardon, I'm sure, for the trouble I gave you. Fact is—I'd been drinking, and drinking just enough to set my tongue going. Fact is too, I was vexed then with a party that shall be

nameless, and being, as I said, the worse for liquor, dragged his name into my yarn. Don't you mind it, mister ! I'm not quite myself when I've had a glass too much—or too little. What I said ain't no more worth remembering than the chatter of the monkeys. Dick Hold's famous for it.—Isn't he, Grincher ?”

Captain Grincher met this appeal with a string of muttered maledictions of a sweeping character, and tinkling the tea-spoon in his tumbler, tossed off the remainder of his grog ; while the American, still swaying himself to and fro, set up a yelp like that of a dog in pain.

“ If you would give me a few moments' conversation,” Lord Harrogate began ; but Dick sullenly cut him short with : “ 'Taint

no manner of use. You think perhaps, because you're a soldier-officer and have a handle to your name, you can order a fellow like me as I'd order the steward, Pompey there, to bring me a can of punch. If so, I"—

"Come, come, Mr. Hold, we need not quarrel," replied Lord Harrogate, with imperturbable good-humour. "I listened to you patiently enough the other night, you know."

"And that's true too," said Hold, dropping his voice to a lower key. "'Twarn't you that sought me before I was blockhead enough to—— Well! sir, or my Lord, I bear no malice. Better pass a wet sponge over that part of your memory where you've scored up what concerns Dick Hold, that's all!"

He drank off the residue of the whisky in his glass as he spoke, and, snapping his fingers, leaned heavily back in his chair, and confronted his visitor with an air of impenetrable obstinacy. It was plainly useless to ply him with argument or question.

"If ever you see cause to change your mind, Captain Hold," said Lord Harrogate as he rose, "I shall be glad to hear from you."

Hold nodded doggedly. But old Captain Grincher insisted on accompanying the guest to the head of the stairs, and in roaring for Pompey, under threat of rope's-ending, to appear and show the gentleman to the street.

"We're not savages," said the veteran apologetically. "We can keep a civil

tongue in our heads, at Plugger's, for such as are civil to us.—Ahoy! darky! snowball! I'll put a little life into you if you don't tumble up smarter when I call.—Good-day, shipmet!”

And Captain Grincher went back to his symposium in the Blue Anchor, leaving Lord Harrogate, under Pompey's guidance, to thread his way to the front door, and emerge at length upon the dank pavement of Dampier's Row.

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER SORT OF CAPTAIN.

BAFFLED, by Richard Hold's singular change of purpose, in his hopes of procuring information from him, Lord Harrogate next turned his attention to the discovery of that officer in the Guards bearing the aristocratic name of Standish, on the back of whose card the words 'Wilkins' and 'ney' were still visible in faded ink. It is not very difficult at the Horse Guards, the War Office, or the Army Agents', to glean some particulars as to the present status of an old officer formerly in the Household Brigade; but

Major Raffington, who was fortunately found in the bay-window of the Pterodactyle Club, in Pall Mall, saved Lord Harrogate the trouble of a reference to these grave authorities.

“I’ve known so many, you see, of the name,” said the major, telling off his quondam acquaintances on the buttons of his waistcoat. “There was Beauty Standish, very vain dog, but remarkably handsome fellow—he died in *Attila’s* year—so long ago as that!” (Major Raffington did not presumably allude to the Hunnish conqueror, but to a by-gone winner of the Derby.) “Then there was Hide-and-Seek Standish, as we called him, who was head and ears in debt, and spent his energies in dodging the bailiffs. And there was Charley, who ex-

changed into the Line, and died of cholera, at Lahore: And—I've purposely kept him till the last! — your man must be old "Trump" Standish, as they nicknamed him, on account of his proclivities for whist. Retired these fifteen years, and no chicken then. Yes, the old boy is alive and in London; chambers at the Albany. He and I are about the only two sensible men in town, for we know when we are well off, and never follow the herd in rushing out of it. Not a member here, old Captain Standish. Belongs to my club, the Walpole, though, and nets his ten or fifteen guineas a night at whist after dinner in the season as well as ever he did. I happen to know he's in London, for we dined alone together yesterday at the Walpole; and I made the

chef give us a more *soigné* bit of dinner than you would think possible at this dead time of year. Not half a bad fellow, old Standish !”

“Captain Standish will be with your Lordship in a minute—he has not quite finished dressing—if your Lordship will please to wait,” the captain’s man had said, as he pushed forward an easy chair, and deferentially smoothed out the morning papers on the table, and then leaving the visitor in the little drawing-room, hurried away through the curtained doors to lend assistance in the tedious process of his master’s toilet.

Lord Harrogate, as he looked around him, felt as though he were in a species of social

museum, so many of the objects which he beheld were suggestive of recollections of the past. On the walls hung the portraits of dead and gone beauties, toasts of other days. The yellow letter, displayed upon yonder table with a sort of ostentatious carelessness, and beginning 'Dear Standish,' was signed by a Royal Highness whose mortal remains has long reposed in crimson-velvet coffin, gold-adorned, under tons of marble. The very perfumes of musk and ambergris that clung to the portfolios and caskets and Books of Beauty and china-bowls artistically disposed on stand and console, were like ghostly scents from some Elysium of an obsolete fashion.

The appearance of the master of these treasures, when at length he presented

himself, with affable bow and smile nicely graduated to display as much as was prudent of his dazzling front-teeth, was perfectly in accordance with the objects around.

"I make no apology, my Lord, for receiving you thus," said the ex-Guardsman, speaking with that measured self-conscious urbanity of tone and bearing which but a few survivors of a courtlier generation yet affect. "There is a time for dressing-gown and slippers, as there is for coat and boots, and I know that I can trust to your kindness to excuse mine."

Captain Standish's dressing-gown and Captain Standish's slippers, on their own merits needed neither excuse nor apology, if once the principle of such elaborate undress could be conceded. The captain

belonged to an era when splendid robes of this kind were habitually worn by men of fashion, and when a dandy received visits draped in brocade or velvet gorgeous with embroidery of floss-silk or gold or silver. He knew better at his time of life, and in the second half of the nineteenth century, than to glimmer in quasi-theatrical magnificence. But the dressing-gown which he wore, a mere pattern of palms on a mouse-gray ground, was such as a king could not buy, now that the remnant of the Cashmere shawl-weavers have ceased to treat the matchless Himalayan wool as once they did; and the purple-velvet slippers, heavy with gold thread from the cunning needles of Stamboul, were worthy of the dressing-gown.

The wearer of these handsome vestments

was a well-preserved, fresh-looking, elderly dandy, with small blue eyes, that were quick to note the pips on each card as it dropped from the hand of the player; a wig that contained a slight but judicious sprinkling of gray; and a firm mouth and chin. His necktie, of the palest buff, was arranged with a neatness unattainable by the careless gilded youth of to-day; and his waistcoat, of a somewhat deeper shade, owed its perfect fit and uncreased smoothness to the combined efforts of tailor, laundress, and valet.

“Had the honour of knowing your father. Knew him as Lord Marlow, in your grandfather’s time. The Harrogate title wasn’t in your branch then. That is why I ventured on the liberty of offering you my hand.”

In saying this, Captain Standish was

within the mark. It was not his whole hand, but three of its blanched and bejewelled fingers that he had extended to Lord Harrogate. To a young man, the famous whist-player seldom held out more than two. In the days and in the society when and where the captain had learned his code of ethics, hand-shaking was a ceremony to be nicely regulated, not lavished, as at present, wholesale.

“It was on the subject of that very title—of the unfortunate event which brought it into our immediate family,” said Lord Harrogate, “that I wish to speak with you, Captain Standish.”

“Ah, indeed!” returned the Guardsman coolly. “Very delighted, of course, if I can be of service in any way, but at the present

moment, believe me, I cannot see how. Sad story! I remember as if it were yesterday the Drawing-room at St. James's, when Clare, Lady Harrogate, went to court *as* Lady Harrogate. As Miss Clare De Vere she had been presented, of course; and I remember how lovely she looked at the great ball at Dorsetshire House. Then she married Ned De Vere—he owed me thirty pounds, poor fellow, the fag-end of an unsettled account at cards, when he broke his neck—and the child was drowned, and—— But bless me! my Lord Harrogate, what can I do to right matters at this time of day?"

Lord Harrogate produced, not the moiety of the torn card, from which Inspector Drew, who clung to it with fanatical tenacity, as

the one undeniable piece of circumstantial evidence available in the case, was reluctant to be separated, but a fac-simile, due to the patient skill of a photographer, at the same time explaining where and how the original had been found.

“I haven’t a doubt of its being my card,” said the captain unhesitatingly. “I have stuck to the model until to-day. See!” he added, as he opened a card-case in embossed silver, and shook out a half-dozen of paste-board parallelograms; “the only change I have seen fit to make is in putting ‘late Grenadier Guards.’ As to how the card got to the towing-path, that,” said Captain Standish meditatively, “is quite another sort of thing. Perhaps a dun dropped it. My tailor, I know, was fond of gudgeon-fishing,

and once boasted to me of his skill in spinning a minnow. 'I'm not an angler myself.'

The written words 'Wilkins' and 'ney' at first suggested nothing to the Guardsman's usually retentive memory. "The only fellow of the name that I remember," he said, stroking his smooth-shaven chin, "was a stage-coachman, Nat Wilkins, who tooled the Cambridge *Telegraph* after Dick Vaughan, that we called Neck-or-nought, died. 'Ney' too is a puzzle to me. Courteney is a name that ends so, to be sure. So does Waveney. I knew Lord Waveney, the present Duke, you know, remarkably well. But he was not a Cambridge tuft, and had nothing to do with Nat Wilkins."

Lord Harrogate, somewhat unwillingly, mentioned the name of Sir Sykes Denzil.

“ Oh, ah, to be sure,” replied the captain, elevating his eyebrows a very little ; “ man that came in by chance for all old Harrogate had to leave. Yes, I knew Sykes Denzil—knew him too when he was so pushed, about the time that old Sir Harbottle went to his rest, that he looked twice at a shilling before he called a hackney or tipped a waiter. And now I think of it,” added the ex-Guardsman with a half-reproachful tap on his square forehead, “ I am reminded somehow of another Wilkins, a lawyer in the City. I’ve had no dealings with the fellow ever since I sent in my papers and left the army ; but he was a useful sort of fellow to gentlemen in difficulties.”

Lord Harrogate drew a deep breath. He stood astonished at his own dulness in not

having identified ere this the owner of the name of Wilkins with that pushing London solicitor who was now law-agent of the Carbery property, and whose influence over Sir Sykes was the subject of much local wonder. As for the 'ney,' that might easily be the last syllable in the word 'attorney,' or it might be part of an address.

"I've a Law List somewhere," said the captain, ringing the bell; and his well-trained servant promptly hunted out the red-backed volume, wherein figured Enoch Wilkins, of St. Nicholas Poultney, in the City of London.

"There you have your 'ney,'" said Captain Standish triumphantly; "and I suppose I recommended the man to Denzil—young

Denzil, as he then was—since the card is mine. But I don't in the least recollect having done so ; and all the cross-examining counsel of the Central Criminal Court would fail, I fear, in refreshing my memory so far as to make me remember it. Yet I conclude I did so, since the card is mine."

CHAPTER III.

FOR VALUABLE CONSIDERATION.

"IN short, Jasper, it must be done!" Sir Sykes groaned out the words rather than spoke them, and as he did so, sank back in his chair and hid his face and almost sobbed. There was something piteous in the abnegation, on the part of a proud, grave man of that dignified decorum which had for years infolded him like a mantle of state, that might have touched the heart of even Jasper. And Jasper seeing his father's distress, and perceiving that it was genuine, was startled, if not sympathetic.

"I don't like to see you thus, sir," he said with unusual gentleness, rising from the chair in which he had lounged till now. He moved a step or two forward, and then stood, as though dubious as to what consolation to offer.

There had never been much confidence between the baronet and his heir. In some respects they were perhaps too much alike, in others as wide apart as the poles; but there were no points of contact in the characters of the two men which could render the company of one congenial to the other. Still, blood is thicker than water, and Jasper could not view quite unmoved his father's evident misery.

"You mean, sir, I think, that I must marry Miss Willis—if she will have me, of

course?" said Jasper slowly. "It is a serious step to take. No backing out of it, when once the words 'I will' have been pronounced. I did not see my way, you may remember, when we talked of this before."

"You did not, as you phrase it, see your way," returned Sir Sykes bitterly; "in other words, you held out for high terms, and now I have no choice but to submit to them. It is the fashion of the day, it would appear, to drive a hard bargain, even when the bargainer is a son dealing with his own father."

Now, this was not an entirely fair remark on the part of Sir Sykes, and Jasper could not but feel that this was so. The baronet had taken it upon himself to force a wife upon his son, and the latter was, according

to all precedent, entitled to expect compensation for the matrimonial sacrifice urged upon him. That he himself was not a model son, the former cavalry officer was well aware ; but he did feel that in this matter of the match with Miss Ruth Willis he was hardly used.

"I don't know about bargaining," said Jasper.

Most men, and many women, have moral natures so oddly tempered that in them vanity takes the precedence of self-interest ; and that it is all but impossible to abstain from resenting a reproach or rebutting an accusation, even if mute meekness would be the most immediately profitable policy. Philosophers, no doubt with the example of Socrates before their mental retina, can

exercise due self-control; and servants—albeit they never heard of the Porch or of the white-robed group of eager disciples jostling round the sage, or of shrill-voiced Xantippe—learn practical philosophy, and can bear to be blamed for what they never did, perhaps reflecting on the many undiscovered peccadilloes that balance the account.

But Jasper, who had not had the advantage of a servant's training, could not help the exculpating of himself from the charge of 'bargaining' with his father, albeit, even as he spoke, he felt his languid pulses quicken at the idea of being promoted to the permanent position of heir-presumptive of Carbery Chase. The words which Sir Sykes had spoken must surely imply a design to yield in that matter of the entail; and as

heir of entail, a new career and new possibilities would open before Jasper Denzil.

"I don't know about bargaining," said Jasper, in an injured tone. Sir Sykes, however, did not take up the ball of contention, and there was silence for a little space. The baronet was the first to speak.

"Old Lord Harrogate's splendid bequest," he said, in a low wearied voice, "has brought with it little happiness. I smile now, when I recall the exultation, half incredulous, with which I first learned that I was master of Carbery and its great rent-roll—I, who had been used to consider money as the one thing needful. Poverty—the poverty of aristocratic beggars, such as were your grandfather and myself—is a stern school-master. I believed in wealth, till I had it."

Jasper felt a faint thrill of genuine sympathy as he hearkened to the sad, almost heart-broken tone in which his father spoke. He said nothing, however, and indeed scarcely knew what to say. It was true enough that Sir Sykes had led but a sequestered and restricted life, with so many opportunities for worldly gratification; but this the ex-Lancer had always set down to eccentricity or a disordered liver. The popular belief which attributed the baronet's morose melancholy to his early bereavement, had never seemed to Jasper other than mythical.

"Ill-got gains," said Sir Sykes, pursuing his train of thought, "do not, they say, prosper. Mine were not strictly ill-got. The great inheritance that fell to me was

not won by dark and crooked means, not even by time-serving and cajolery. I am blameless as regards that. But I do assure you, my son, that if I had the power to put back the hands of Time's inexorable dial, and be young again, with creditors clutching at the price of my commission, and duns besetting me at every turn, I would cheerfully give up Carbery, to be once more the needy man I was when I left India."

This really seemed to Jasper so very unreasonable, that he did not know how to reply. His notion was that there were, for a gentleman of high degree, only two good and substantial grounds for unhappiness—an overdrawn balance, and the meeting with cold-shoulders and averted eyes in club and

betting-ring. Still it was incumbent on him to make some reply.

"I think, sir," he said, "that a change would do you good—change of air, change of scene, and that sort of thing. Even a scamper over the continent would be delightful after the monotony of this"—he was going to say "old jail," but checked himself, and said—"style of existence" instead.

"All I can hope for now is to go down to my grave in quiet," resumed Sir Sykes, ignoring his son's not ill-intended advice. "I should not like my remaining years to be overshadowed by a cloud of shame, or to have Scorn's finger pointed at me. Believe me, Jasper, that when I ask you to offer your hand in marriage to Miss Willis I do not do so without a sufficient reason. It

may be immaterial to you whether or not the finger of Reproach be directed against your father; but you cannot be indifferent to your own interest, and that is deeply concerned in your compliance with my urgent wishes. Here"—throwing it on the table—"is a draught of my instructions to Mr. Wilkins. Your marriage settlements and the deed entailing the estate can, if you please, be signed on the same day."

Jasper shrugged his shoulders with a deprecatory action, took up the paper, and glanced at its contents. Nothing could by possibility be more explicit. Carbery Chase with its broad acres was henceforth, like any other entailed estate, to pass from father to son according to the strictest rules of primogeniture. Entailers are prone to tie up their

lands by will ; but in this case the unusual expedient of a deed was to render Jasper's rights over the property independent of Sir Sykes's pleasure.

"Nothing could be more handsome, I must own," said Jasper, a little sheepish in his deportment as he concluded the perusal.

"Say rather, that nothing could better prove the necessity of the case," retorted the baronet peevishly. "I presume, now, that I have met your wishes, that you will no longer object to conform to mine."

"You mean, sir, about Miss Willis?" asked Jasper, to be quite sure of his fact before pledging himself.

Sir Sykes nodded silently. What he underwent was probably undreamed of by his son, whose moral fibre was of a coarser

quality. This unnatural bargaining, this higgling over a marriage on one hand and the reversion of an estate on the other, was to him absolute torture. He had set great store by men's opinion of him, had prized his fair renown and worldly repute above all things, and now he felt himself humbled both in his own eyes and in Jasper's by the humiliating concession to which he had been brought.

"I am ready, sir," said Jasper slowly, "to submit my judgment to yours in this business. After your great kindness"—here Sir Sykes made an impatient movement, but uttered no word—"I can do no less. Miss Willis, I have no doubt of it, will make an excellent wife, as wives go. I have to propose, however, and to be accepted, if I am" ——

Sir Sykes did not appear inclined to discuss the probability of his son's proposals being rejected by his ward.

"You will have an ample income to begin with," he said shortly; "nor do I care how soon, in the course of nature, Carbery devolves upon you. Rest and peace, rest and peace! Could I but insure these for the short residue of my life, I should ask no more."

"Well, well!" returned Jasper, with a blunt indifference to his father's feelings, of which he was himself but half aware. "The women at any rate like a wedding, so Lucy and Blanche no doubt will be pleased to be bride's-maids. And we shall have to quarter the arms of Willis in the old Denzil escutcheon. By-the-by, what are the arms of

Willis? It's odd how little I know of the fair Ruth's lineage."

"Take my word for it," said Sir Sykes, rising in anger, "that the girl has good blood in her veins, better, it may be, than your own." Having said which, the baronet left the room without a word of explanation.

"Particularly shady business," soliloquised Jasper, when the door had closed upon his father. "However, I am the slave of my word—when it's made worth my while—and I'll speak to Miss — Willis before I sleep."

CHAPTER IV.

ACCEPTED.

A BOOK, and not a dull one, might be compiled from existing anecdotes bearing on the one single subject of what, half a century ago, was known by the playful periphrasis of 'popping the question.' Popguns matrimonial have always been of the most various quality, some discharged, as it were, by the lightest touch to a hair-trigger, and others given to hang fire like some clumsy arquebuse of the middle ages. There have been proposals of marriage after an acquaintance of an hour's duration, and instances of

prudent suitors who looked before leaping for so many years that the stealing on of age rendered any leap at all unnecessary. And out of the number of those who contrive to get married, the immense majority, if quite candid, would avow that they blundered into a proposal, rather than spoke their minds of set purpose and at a time deliberately selected.

“It’s got to be done,” said Jasper, as he left the library, and with a young man’s usual impatience when an irksome task is laid upon him, he told himself that there was no time like the present for the necessary interview with the object of his affections. He was a cool, hackneyed man of the little-great world of fashionable London, and as such was not likely to be troubled by

those tortures of shyness which afflict raw curates or callow sub-lieutenants. Yet, as he made his way towards the room wherein he expected to find her whom he sought, his step was slow, and his knitted brow and downcast eye gave token of unusual thoughtfulness. What was the key to the enigma, what the truth concerning this mystery, that had exercised Jasper's sharp but shallow wits ever since the day when he had dogged his father's footsteps to *The Traveller's Rest*, and played the eaves-dropper during the baronet's conversation with so very dubious an acquaintance as Richard Hold? Who was this girl, whom he had pledged himself to marry, yet of whom he knew absolutely nothing beyond the fact of her inexplicable influence over Sir Sykes, and that she had

been received under the roof of her present guardian in compliance with the demand of such a man as Hold? What had Sir Sykes done, that he should have become the puppet and the victim of a ruffianly adventurer such as Hold, and what interest had the latter in pushing the fortunes of the baronet's ward?

Jasper was not very scrupulous. His opinion of women was so emphatically that they were not to be trusted, that he did not look for any very exalted ideal of feminine perfection in his future wife. If he cared for any one, it was for Lady Gladys De Vere, and he had sense enough to know that Lady Gladys neither liked him nor respected him. Not that he had taken to heart this humiliating lesson in a manner calculated to yield profit.

"It's because I'm broken down," he had said to himself more than once; and he really did believe that had he still been in the full swim of metropolitan fashion and heir-apparent to Carbery Chase, Lady Gladys or any other virtuous and well-bred young lady would have regarded him as a big fish worth the catching, quite irrespective of his past history and personal faults. Now, he had offered to him an opportunity of feeling solid ground beneath his feet, of taking up a position whence no caprice could dislodge him, of becoming heir of entail to the fine estate so long coveted. The gift was saddled with an awkward condition, to be sure, but Jasper was ready to take any female hand that was weighted with such a dowry as that of the Devonshire estate.

As Captain Denzil had anticipated, Ruth Willis was in the morning-room that overlooked the rose-garden. She was not alone. His sister Blanche was with her. Something in Jasper's face, something in Jasper's manner, served to make Blanche, within five minutes of her brother's entrance, take up her lacework and glide quietly out of the room. Girls have a subtle instinct which enables them to divine when a man is going to make an offer of marriage to one of their company, and a sympathy with match-making which induces them, even to their own detriment, to lend a helping hand to the swain who comes a-wooing. Blanche Denzil was not excessively fond of the Indian orphan, and did not consider the alliance as one precisely suitable to her brother, yet

some feminine freemasonry made her leave a clear stage for the suitor to tell his tale.

Ruth did not change colour or assume an air of self-consciousness, but sat quiet, plying her crochet-needle with perfect composure.

"I thought you were out, Captain Denzil," she said coolly.

"No; I have been talking to my father, Miss Willis," said Jasper, determining to make the plunge at once—"talking, by Jove, about you."

"Of me? You did me very great honour then, Captain Denzil," said Ruth, with a slightly scornful ring, as Jasper fancied, in her voice. "Sir Sykes, however, is always kind."

"He means to be kind," said the ex-

cavalry officer, smoothing out his moustache.
“You’ll be mistress one day—I hope of course it won’t be very soon—of Carbery Chase; and in the meantime”——

Ruth arched her eyebrows a very little, and Jasper came to a shamefaced stop in his discourse. It occurred to him for the first time that he had taken for granted both the proposal and the acceptance.

“Either you are mocking me”—— Ruth began slowly, and with a malicious glitter in her elfish eyes.

“No; by Jove! not for the world, Miss Willis,” protested Jasper.

“Or,” continued Ruth, “you come as an ambassador, to communicate to me, as your words imply, a proposal of marriage on the part of your father”——

“No ; but of myself—hang it, yes !” interrupted Jasper, with vexation in his tone and look. “You are so hard on a fellow, Miss Willis ; and—and I’m a little confused, and that. I only mean to say I think I’ve shown you pretty plainly, Miss Willis, how much I admired you ; and now I’ve come to-day to ask you to make me the happiest of men by consenting to be my wife.”

(“It was neatly put, though I say so—rather well rounded, ’pon my word it was,” Jasper said, between the puffs of his cigar, on the occasion of a visit which he paid to his old friend Captain Prodgers in the cavalry barracks of the county town ; and indeed by that time he had come to look on the mode of his making the offer as rather a creditable performance than otherwise.)

“ You speak seriously,” said Miss Willis, looking up, without a blush or tremor, in his face.

“ Yes ; I do,” returned the young man—
“ Ruth, dear Ruth !” And he took her hand, and tried to pass his arm around her slender waist. She suffered her hand to be taken, but the encircling arm she put aside.

“ And you ask me to marry you—soon ?” said Ruth, smiling ; a strange smile it was, and made the stranger by the singular expression of the eyes. If ever eyes were fraught with an exultant yet self-restrained sense of power, they were those of Ruth Willis as she rose to her feet and confronted her suitor.

“ Indeed, I do—my dearest wish,” stammered out Jasper.

"Then you shall have your dearest wish," answered Ruth. "You have made me a very flattering and generous offer, Captain Denzil; and I accept it, accept it in the same frank spirit as that in which it is made. You ask me to be your wife, and I answer, Yes."

Having said this with no hesitation, no trace of weakness or emotion, and with that impish glitter still visible in her dark eyes, the little lady quietly released her hand from that of Jasper, swept him a courtesy such as would not have disgraced the old Bourbon court of Versailles, and was gone from his sight and from the room before he had time to recover from the amazement which her singular behaviour caused him. Jasper was but half-pleased. He was as

little in love as any fortune-hunter who had ever burned his mercenary incense before the shrine of a moneyed idol; but though the business of the hour had been shuffled through with business-like promptitude, he could not feel that his own part in it had been of a dignified character.

“Never mind,” he muttered, as he rambled off to smoke by himself in the grounds; “it all comes to the same thing in the long run. There’s no nonsense about her, at any rate.” And then he fell to dreaming over his cigar, of the prospect of a return next season to London, and of all the brilliant prospects that a command of money such as he should now be able to borrow would open out before him.

CHAPTER V.

THE WALK BESIDE THE RIVER.

AGAIN was Ruth Willis pacing to and fro beneath the trees, on the stony bank that overhung the swift but narrow river that brawled below on its short but noisy journey from lofty Dartmoor to the sea. The spot, as has been mentioned, was a favourite one with the Indian orphan. Thither it was that she had repaired months before to read the stolen letter snatched from Sir Sykes's library table, and thither she went again on the afternoon of the day, the morning of which had witnessed Jasper's proposal and her own acceptance of it.

Time and the Seasons—which are Time's handmaids, and do their work diligently each in her allotted groove—had not been idle since that earlier day when Ruth, like a caged tigress, had stalked to and fro upon the bank, scarce heedful of the brawling of the clamorous water below, the stolen letter firmly clasped in her small hand. Then the rustling greenery of the thick leaves overhead had interposed a screen between her and the hot summer sun. Now the pale yellow beams glinted on bare stems, and boughs from which the red and russet leaves were falling fast.

“I am the first,” said Ruth to herself, as, by a quick glance, she perceived that she was the only occupant of that lonely nook. “He will not fail me, though.”

And indeed she had not taken more than half-a-dozen turns before the cracking of dead sticks and the snapping of twig and brushwood announced that somebody was bursting rudely through the ornamental belt of woodland ; and through the parting boughs appeared the bronzed countenance and stalwart form of Richard Hold.

"The booby has spoken, has he?" said Hold, after one glance at his sister, as he stood, dusty and panting, in the path.

"How do you know that?" asked Ruth tartly.

"I read it in your face," answered the man, passing the back of his broad hand across his heated brow. "Besides, he was bound to speak. Money will do it, money ! What won't it do ? Answer me that ! For

the fear of losing it or the hope of winning it, how men will creep and wriggle and grovel in the dust, and fawn and whimper and whine !”

“ You have been drinking, brother !” said Ruth in reproachful accents.

“ Drinking ? I always have. How’s a man to kill time and get on from one thing to another without drinking ? If one didn’t drink, how do you suppose, my lass, a man could live ?” demanded Hold, in the aggrieved tone of one who feels that the fundamental principles of his belief are being called in question.

“ We women don’t do it,” answered Ruth, pursing up her lips.

“ You don’t, Missy, and it’s well you don’t,” rejoined Richard good-humouredly.

"If ever, in the newfangled days they say are coming, you have to use your brains as we use ours, perhaps you'll learn the way to the bottle too. I'm none the worse, though, for what I took before I left *The Rest*. Now spin your yarn, my girl, and I'll lend it the best attention I can muster."

"Well, Dick," said Ruth, sidling up to him, "your guess, in the first place, was correct. Captain Denzil did come to me and ask me to be his wife."

"And you didn't say No!" replied Hold with a nod and a chuckle.

"I said Yes," returned Ruth; "but I said it with such scorn, with such flippant, cold indifference of voice and action, that if the man had had a drop of manly blood in his veins, a spark of manly feeling in his heart,

he would have flung back the hand I permitted him to take, and plucked away his neck from the gilded yoke to which, in his greed and laziness, he had bowed it. He resented my treatment, as I could see, but he had not the honesty to show it. How I despise him! How, if we come to be married, I shall learn to hate him!"

"There's no doubt about the marrying, is there?" asked Hold anxiously.

"There is always a chance, brother, in a case of this sort, that Fate or Death may forbid the banns!" returned Ruth. "But so far as promises go, the bird is springed already."

"I made pretty sure of that," observed the seaman, pushing back the dark grizzled hair that protruded from under his felt hat.





"My last letter to Sir Sykes, sent over from *The Traveller's Rest* but yesterday, called a spade a spade, I reckon."

"Sometimes it answers better," said Ruth coldly, "to call it an agricultural implement. You are too headstrong, Brother Dick, and should remember the old adage about the iron hand in the velvet glove."

"I never heard it," was Dick's blunt rejoinder, "and shouldn't have valued it the snapping of a gun-flint if I had. Book-learning don't count for much with me, Missy. And that's odd too, considering where I was raised; but, after all, a pastry-cook's 'prentice has no appetite for tarts. Well! my hand can grip pretty strongly; but I don't muffle it up in gloves of any sort, kid or velvet. And it is because I've

squeezed Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet, as smartly as I have, that you have had Young Hopeful at your feet to-day."

"And now," said Ruth pleasantly, and adapting her metaphor—as it was her wont to do when desirous to conciliate her formidable ally—to the seaman's calling—"now that we are coming into port with a fair wind and a full sail, would it not be foolish to yaw the ship out of her course into shoal-water, Dick?"

"You're a smooth-spoken one, Missy!" rejoined Hold, with a sort of admiration expressed in the ring of his gruff voice; "and deserve to be a lady, and to wear silks and satins, and eat off gold, and ride in a grand carriage; never a doubt of that! But I've set my heart, my dear, on helping

you to your rights, and I'll not rest until you have them, or my name's not Dick."

"You mean—as to the name?" said Ruth quickly.

"I do mean as to the name," stubbornly rejoined Richard. "Why on earth should you be married as Ruth Willis, when you could be 'my Lady' from the first?"

Ruth shook her head, and somewhat of a cloud came over her dark intelligent features.

"A barren title, I have felt from the beginning, could avail us little," she said softly. "Carbery Chase and the fat acres represented a prize worth the winning; and remember I shall be called Lady Denzil when Sir Sykes dies."

"You shall be called by a finer word

than that on your wedding day," persisted Dick obstinately. "I want to make them stare, those quality folks, who eye an honest sailor as though he were an escaped galley-slave. I want to strip that dandy lord of his borrowed plumes ; though, after all, he's not so bad a chap, by a sight, as either of the Denzils, young or old. And I want the fop of a bridegroom—ha, ha ! a pretty life you'll lead him once the knot is tied !—want him to feel himself, as he will be, as the dirt under your feet compared with such a lady as you'll be."

"Now, brother," said Ruth in persuasive accents, and laying her hand as she spoke with a light touch on the mariner's arm, "you know well enough that in affairs of real difficulty I come to you to pilot me

clear of the dangers in my track. This affair of the title is, in comparison with the solid advantages already secured, a small matter. Don't let us jeopardise our winnings merely to gratify a whim"—

"No; but to drive the nail home and clench it!" interrupted Hold, striking his closed fist heavily into the open palm of the other hand. "Dainty, well-educated bit of a thing as you are, I know these people you live among better than you do yourself, and I know that it doesn't do to be mealy-mouthed in dealing with them. What has brought old Stiffback—old Sir Arrogant—to his senses, but the gentle reminder I gave him that it rested with me to make him exchange his luxurious home for—— Never mind what! I'll make him swallow

yet another of the bitter pills I keep in store for him, and own you for what you are—a lady in your ”——

“ Dick, Dick ! something whispers to me that harm will come of this, that your rashness will spring the mine, and blow us and our schemes into the air. Wait till after the wedding. Wait till I am safe ! ” pleaded Ruth ; but she pleaded in vain. Hold laughed at her fears.

“ Hark ye, my lass,” he said in his gruff tones. “ Once we were chased—never mind why—by a Queen’s ship, and our only chance of escape lay in going through a channel marked in the charts as doubly dangerous. The gap was so narrow you might have tossed a biscuit on to the reef either side. Ahead, the water foamed and

seethed on sandbank and sunken rock, and astern was the enemy, doing his best with his long gun to cripple our spars. Twice, as I handled the schooner, I heard the grating of her keel on the stones below, while down rattled boom and yard, shot away by the pursuer. Should we strike and fill, the stoutest swimmer had small chance to gain the shore, the water was so alive with sharks. And my mates lost heart, and 'Give in, Dick,' says one, and 'Give in, cap'en,' says another. What they wanted was to back topsails, lay to, and wait till Her Majesty's gunboat overhauled us, rather than keep our course in that perilous thread of water."

"Well!" said Ruth, as the man paused for breath. She was interested in spite of

herself, in the wild tale, irrelevant as she deemed it to the business in hand.

"Well," rejoined Richard forcibly, "I was of another sort of stuff, I guess—no white spots about *my* heart—and I cracked on, carried the schooner through places where the man-of-war didn't dare to follow, and got off by the skin of my teeth, it's true; but then, as often, a miss proved as good as a mile. That was the time they first put upon me the name of Daredevil Dick."

"You are a bold fellow. Nobody doubts it!" said Ruth, looking in her turn with involuntary and as it were extorted admiration at the bronzed countenance of the narrator, now all aglow with a pride perhaps not wholly unjustifiable. A bad man was Richard Hold. He had ugly memories to

plague him in his sober moments, and was now a hardened Ishmaelite, whose hand had been against the hands of all men for many a sinful year ; but he had some good points. It was not difficult to fancy a state of things in which his reckless courage might have won him the laurels of a rugged hero.

“Men don’t often question my grit, anyhow,” answered Hold grimly. “I just told you the story of how we showed a clean pair of heels to H.M.’s gunboat *Stinger*, because I wished you to see, Missy, that I like to be commander of my own craft. What do I care for pompous old Sir Sykes ? I’ve angered in my time those whose black looks boded worse than his could do. He’ll have to grin and bear it.”

Ruth was but ill-pleased. She had learned,

however, by experience that beyond a certain point Richard Hold could not safely be thwarted, and that, with a considerable share of practical shrewdness, there was in him a dash of that stubborn savagery which prompts the bleeding bull of the Spanish arena to stoop his shaggy neck and rush, through flaring fireworks and fluttering flags, full at the mounted lancers.

"You won't at any rate speak to-day, Dick?" she said, looking up into his face.

"No; I'll give them that much grace," returned Hold, with one of his hard laughs. "To-morrow I'll teach them to dance to a new tune."

This, Ruth felt, was something gained. She might then break the bad news to Sir Sykes, tutor him to play his part, soften the

stroke which she could not quite avert. She had lived long enough at Carbery Chase to appreciate the horror with which well-bred people endure 'a scene.' There was no help for it now ; the scene must be made. But by a little timely tact its effects might be rendered less intensely disagreeable.

"Think it over again, brother!" said Ruth at parting. "I wish you saw, as I do, that quiet ways succeed the best."

"But for me, Missy, you'd not be here," answered Hold shortly. "Well, good-night!"

And so they parted.

CHAPTER VI.

STRICKEN DOWN.

“HURRAH ! hurrah ! hurrah !” and yet again
“Hurrah !” The deep ringing shout grew
louder—so it seemed—at every repetition,
as though the shouters, at the sound of their
own voices, had warmed to their work.
“Hurrah ! hurrah ! hurrah !” Shrill boys,
gruff men, stripling yokels that alternated
between bass and treble, helped to swell the
increasing roar of popular exultation. The
carrier passing with his cart, the rustic
trudging with shouldered hoe homewards,
the wandering tinker, stopped and marvelled

as the unaccustomed sounds floated on the noonday breeze.

The English farm-labourer is—as those who know him well and, with all his shortcomings, like him well, will admit—a dumb animal. His efforts to speak articulately are often painful to his best friends, and indeed, as a rule, his tongue is an organ which from lack of use has almost ceased to be efficient. Your town workman uses six words, your operative ten, to his one growlingly-uttered monosyllable. But, under the pressure of excitement, if he cannot talk, he can cheer. Stir his slow blood to anger, and he can be loud enough. Give him beer gratis, and he will be louder.

There was beer flowing without stint, and of better quality than the neighbouring ale-

house supplied, and there was cider also for all comers on that day at Carbery Chase; and it was quite wonderful with what rapidity the news spread, or how it was telegraphed to solitary shepherds amid the heather, to husbandmen kindling weed-fires on hill-tops, to woodcutters plying axe and hedge-bill in the coppice, that the lost heiress of the De Veres was found, and that there was eleemosynary liquor at Carbery for whatsoever thirsty soul came that way.

Richard Hold had done it all. He had come down that morning from *The Traveller's Rest* to Carbery Court, had effected an entry with but faint-hearted opposition on the part of the half-terrified servants; and, after the briefest interview with Sir Sykes, had called together the startled household, and had

roundly, and in a discourse garnished with strange expletives, proclaimed Miss Ruth Willis to be Helena, Lady Harrogate, the only child (supposed to have been drowned in the Thames nearly twenty years before) of the late Baroness Clare, and whose rightful name had only just by accident been revealed.

It was an astounding story, thus told, and one which needed to be confirmed ; but what better confirmation could the hearers have than that which was afforded by the presence of the baronet, standing ever at Hold's side, conferring with him in confidential tones, and corroborating by word and gesture the loose and random statements of this extraordinary coadjutor ! That the servants should bow, smirk, and submit,

when once they found that Sir Sykes lent his countenance to the new order of things, was but natural. Well-trained servants, to pleasure a solvent master, would accede to most doctrines. And the idea of the finding of the lost child, lost under circumstances so touching, had in itself the power to arouse the leaven of romance that lies dormant in almost every mind.

The sad story of that poor young Clare, in her own right Lady Harrogate, whose child had disappeared within a few months of its father's death in the hunting-field, was known to every village gossip on the shady side of forty. That the lost heiress—heiress to a bare title, but as such the head of the ancient race of the De Veres—should be found, was precisely one of those marvels

which suit with the popular imagination. Heirs, and heiresses too, have been before to-day reinstated in their rights amidst bell-ringing and triumphal arches and the honest joy of sympathetic multitudes.

But—there was a *but* in the case—to the credit of the local population, although people were quite willing to fling up their hats and bawl themselves hoarse for the providential recovery of the missing Helena, Lady Harrogate, all seemed reluctant to believe that the brows on which the coronet should devolve were those of Miss Willis. Had the Indian orphan been suddenly ‘wanted’ by London policemen on suspicion of ring-stealing or the passing of forged bank-notes, fifty village oracles would have been found to declare that the surprise was

no surprise to them. But in the midst of all the buzz and hum and stir which the tidings occasioned, might be distinguished an undercurrent of regret that fortune should have selected so sly a young person as the recipient of her favours.

Rumour, the general voice of fame concerning man or woman, grossly as it exaggerates, seldom fails to hit off some salient point, and so contains a germ of truth. And it is extraordinary by what unknown means facts the most carefully concealed do contrive to gain a surreptitious publicity. Excepting Sir Sykes and his two daughters, there was hardly a man, woman, or child on the estate who had not some hazy notions to the effect that Miss Ruth Willis slipped from the house by night to meet somebody, had

mysterious correspondence with somebody, stole letters, played the spy on other inmates of the house, and was indeed by no means a model of feminine innocence and candour.

The servants and the villagers—glad of the temporary excitement which the proclamation of the new-found heiress afforded—yet grudged Ruth her promotion. She bore her blushing honours modestly enough, it was admitted; but then, as it was uncharitably surmised, that was all a part of those artful ‘goings-on’ that were attributed to her. What had she to do with that seafaring fellow, with the blue thin scar over one eyebrow, as likely to have been got from the brass-hilted cutlass of a man-of-war’s man as from the creese of a Malay? Why did she glide, cat-like, through the shadows

of night, and why drop letters with her own hand into the slits of village post-offices, not trusting the locked letter-bag of the mansion, as an honest young lady should do? Why, indeed? And yet it seemed she was to be called 'my Lady' now; and those who remembered the pomp and power of the late Lord regarded her as little less than a princess.

Sir Sykes Denzil, tottering rather than walking at Hold's side, resembled a somnambulist rather than a man in the full possession of his waking faculties. "He don't seem to be quite hisself, he don't!" was the remark of more than one sympathetic hedger and ditcher, as he marked the feeble gait, the vacant eye, and the abject pomposity—if such a phrase may be



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coined for the occasion—of the master of all. It was a cruel ordeal for Sir Sykes. It had not come upon him without warning. Ruth had spoken to him over-night, and he had sat up alone in the library till very late, schooling himself how best to bear the trial. He thought he had learned the necessary lesson when at length he laid his throbbing head on its soft pillows.

But the trial, in its hard, nude reality, in the garish, searching light of day, had seemed so much more terrible to Sir Sykes than his previous idea of it had been, that he had proved all too weak an Atlas to cope with such a load of care. In the course of the morning, Hold had arrived, bold and boastful; and in ten minutes more the dreaded publicity was given to the fact that

Ruth Willis was the heiress of the De Veres, and that the living voucher for her claims was Sir Sykes Denzil. A more miserable position than that of the master of Carbery Chase cannot well be conceived. Had he been suddenly called on to account for some old crime, which tardy justice had at length scented out, he could better have borne it than when he found himself dragged along at Hold's side, to sanction the adventurer's statements and commands. It was by Hold's orders that the ale was flowing from a score of casks, that the bells in three church towers had struck up a joy-peal, that a bawling crowd of untimeous revellers had collected around the ancient buttery hatch. All the other members of the family had acquitted themselves fairly well. Jasper

had publicly congratulated his bride-elect on the lucky discovery. Jasper's excellent sisters had kissed Ruth, crying, as girls will kiss and cry on every occasion of mirth or sorrow. "I am so glad, dear!" Lucy had said bewildered, and Blanche had echoed her words. It had never occurred to either of the baronet's daughters to question the truth of a revelation for which their father stood sponsor.

"Ale and cider, since they like it, for the clod-hoppers; punch and wine for the farmers," commanded Hold. "None of your washy claret, but good old-fashioned port and sherry, d'ye hear?—Up with the cob-webbed bottles, Mr. Butler, and make the corks fly.—And you, lads, show the metal you're made of! One cheer more,

and let it be a good one — Helena, Lady Harrogate !”

To this and much more Sir Sykes gave an obsequious assent. He had not as yet had to run the gauntlet of any positive questioning as to the details of the story of the lost heiress’s disappearance and recovery. His own household, in the excitement of the hour, accepted assertion in the place of proof. Two phrases there were which Sir Sykes, with dull iteration, often repeated. “My esteemed friend Mr. Hold, to whose active exertions this discovery is chiefly due ;” that was one of them. The other was : “This young lady, whose rights I consider to be beyond dispute, and whose champion, in case of need, I shall ever be willing to be.” The baronet repeated these

catchwords over and over again, like a lesson imperfectly learned, and each time there came a murmur of mild applause from the docile audience.

At last there was a murmur as of expectation, and almost of alarm, amid the crowd, and Lord Harrogate, who had ridden over from High Tor, came into the centre of the principal group, smiling.

"The great news has brought me, like the other neighbours," he said half-jestingly, as he shook hands first with Lucy and Blanche Denzil, and then bowed gravely to Ruth, as he passed on to take the trembling hand that Sir Sykes half-mechanically extended. "If I have heard aright, I have no further claim to the name they call me by ; although, more fortunate than other usurpers, I have

another title on which to fall back, and need not become just plain Mr. De Vere. But this is a surprise for us all, Sir Sykes."

Sir Sykes Denzil's face worked painfully, every muscle seeming to quiver like that of a martyr at the stake. He glanced at Hold, more with the piteous appealing look that a performing dog directs at its master than with the expression of a responsible human being.

"My esteemed friend, Mr. Hold," he muttered in a thick voice that struck strangely on the ear.

"Ah! Mr. Hold then knows all about the mystery?" said Lord Harrogate with a quiet smile.

"Yes; I know a thing or two," boldly returned Richard; "and so too does Sir

Sykes Denzil, Baronet. Don't doubt, squire, or 'my Lord'—though you must down your flag now, and give up the Harrogate title to 'my Lady' here—that we shall be able to produce manifest, invoice, and log-book to make good the ship's claims to the name she's called by.—Shan't we, Sir Sykes?"

Sir Sykes thus cited, made an effort to speak. "This young lady," he began, and then was mute.

"This young lady," said Lord Harrogate, turning to Ruth, and speaking with a graceful courtesy that became him well, "shall not, I assure you, be delayed in the acquisition of her lawful due by any act of mine or of my family, when once the romantic history has been explained a little more clearly than has hitherto been the case. If she

turns out to be really the lost child of my cousin Clare, Lady Harrogate, I can promise that all at High Tor will "——

"Whose champion — champion," interrupted Sir Sykes, continuing the sentence he had begun, in the same thick unnatural voice as before, "yes, whose champion"——

Then there came a crash and a shriek and a rush of feet, and the gabble and outcry and uplifting of many voices. All seemed to speak and none to listen; but one thing was certain—Sir Sykes had fallen down in a fit; and they raised him speechless and helpless, with distorted face and stiffened limbs, and bore him in and laid him on his bed. "Paralysis," was the verdict of the doctor who was summoned in hot haste; "and I fear his death-blow."

CHAPTER VII.

THE INSPECTOR'S TELEGRAM.

LORD HARROGATE, riding slowly homewards across the High Tor park, came suddenly upon his young sister Lady Alice and Miss Gray her governess, as they emerged from amid the deep fern, light green in summer, fawn-yellow now, that clothed the upper dells of that picturesque inclosure. He dismounted, and passing his horse's bridle over his arm, walked slowly on with the two girls towards the house.

"I am fresh from Carbery," he said. "I bring bad news though, so far as our

friends at the Chase are concerned. Sir Sykes, poor man, has been struck down by paralysis."

"How dreadful!" said Ethel. "We did but just hear, your sister and I, as we started for our walk, that some wonderful good fortune had befallen the young lady Miss Willis, who lives at the Chase, and were wondering at the bell-ringing and shouts, which seemed so persistent, when you bring back these tidings. Poor Sir Sykes!"

"My father will be shocked and sorry," said Lord Harrogate thoughtfully. "Maud and Gladys too will feel it for the sake of the Denzil girls. It is a strange affair altogether. Sir Sykes's behaviour, when I saw him first, was like that of a sleep-

walker, while he seemed quite submissive to that piratical-looking fellow, Captain Richard Hold as he calls himself—the swarthy man whose presence seems so out of keeping with our peaceful Devonshire lanes.”

“He used to hang about the school-house in the village formerly, until I was more than half-afraid of the gaze of his bold keen eyes,” returned Ethel; while her pupil vehemently exclaimed: “I hate the wretch! I’m sure he has murdered—oh, I can’t say how many poor creatures at the other side of the world! I wouldn’t take his word, if it is he who tells the story about Miss Willis being a great heiress, as I suppose he does.”

“Do not you really know, Alice,” re-

joined Lord Harrogate, "who it is that Sir Sykes's ward is now declared to be? It is no mighty heritage after all which her supporters claim on her behalf; only the baron's coronet which, by courtesy, belongs to me. I should be very glad to cede it to a more rightful wearer, only I should be glad to know how Miss Willis is the rightful wearer. My own idea is that she is not."

"You think then, Lord Harrogate, that the claim is a wrongful one?" asked Ethel timidly.

"Of course I do," answered the young man, smiling. "Think for a moment of what we are asked to believe. First, Sir Sykes receives a ward, recommended to him by a dying brother-officer, Major Willis; and in the course of a few weeks we hear

that this orphaned young lady from India is to be married to our friend Captain Denzil, whom we had not looked upon as being of such susceptible stuff as to be capable of a Romeo-and-Juliet courtship. All the time, a singular-looking ruffian of the seafaring persuasion, who only needs the pistols and the silk scarf and red Catalan cap to make him up into a stage pirate, hovers about the place, and has a finger in the pie which is baking. Lastly, under the direction of this same maritime rascal, we are told to call the young lady from India our cousin, and to recognise as Helena, Lady Harrogate, one whom yesterday we knew as Miss Ruth Willis."

"Ruth—Ruth?" murmured Ethel, putting her hand to her forehead, as if to

recall some wandering thought that had for an instant glanced athwart her mind. "Was not that *my* name, very long ago, at Sandston?"

"Was it so?" asked Lord Harrogate with a sudden interest.

"I thought so for a moment," answered Miss Gray thoughtfully. "For an instant there seemed to flit before my eyes the image of a little child, playing on the beach, and who was called Ruth by those who came to chide her kindly, for venturing too near the summer sea-waves. And yet I only know myself by the name you all know me by."

"I wish, if Lady Clare's child had to be found," said young Lady Alice impulsively, "that you had been the one, Ethel dear, and not that odious, scheming Miss Willis."

"I am afraid," returned Ethel, in her gentle way, "there is nothing very wonderful to be made out of my origin. I know nothing of my father in Australia, except his name of Gray."

"And are you sure that you never bore another name than that of Gray?" asked Lord Harrogate, with the same appearance of a sudden interest which he had previously shown.

"No ; I cannot be sure," answered Ethel, turning her beautiful eyes towards him for the first time. "Young children, I think, are seldom as clear about the surname as the Christian name they hear so often. I do not think it was I who was called Ruth. And the earliest recollection I have—it is so vague and confused that it does not deserve

to be called a recollection at all—is that I was very much frightened, and was crying, and was bidden not to cry, by a man whose face and voice were strange to me, and of whom I have often dreamed since, as though he had been the ogre of a nursery tale.”

“Can you remember no more?” said Lord Harrogate attentively.

“No,” answered Ethel, smiling. “I have often tried to summon my recollections on that point, and could never succeed in making out more than that I was very frightened, and was carried somewhere by somebody, and cried, and was chidden for crying. One thing—it seems too trivial to be worth speaking of—comes back to me persistently. I was sitting on

the ground—I must have been very little indeed—and playing with some great sea-shells of a rose-pink colour, with spikes on them that reminded me of the horns of a pet goat that I seemed to have had as a playfellow somewhere else. It is childish, is it not, to remember such trifles?”

“I don’t know about that,” said Lord Harrogate seriously; “very important affairs have been decided before this on the strength of seeming trifles, and will be again. You never, I think—forgive me if I distress you—had any direct communication with the gentleman in Australia whom you have been taught to regard as your father?”

“No,” Ethel answered with a trembling lip; “he never wrote. He sent money

during the first years, but it was through the hands of a lawyer, as I believe, in London; but he never wrote. Even the colony in which he lives was not mentioned when first he left me at Sandston."

"How delightful it would be!" burst out youthful Lady Alice, who was energetic in her likes and dislikes, "if it should turn out that this Mr. Gray was not your father at all, Ethel, love, and that you were"——

"A telegram, my Lord," said one of the High Tor footmen, who had hurried down across the park to deliver the missive, since the tardy approach of the conversing group had been observed. There are still households in which the primitive respect for news flashed along the wires exists as when the telegraph was a startling novelty, and

besides, there was a high respect entertained among the Earl's domestics for the character and abilities of 'my young Lord,' and a half-superstitious idea that he might be one day summoned to great promotion at Windsor or Whitehall.

The telegram was from Inspector Drew of the detective police.

" 'Discovery — further examination of card,' " read out Lord Harrogate; " 'seems important. Wish for interview.'—Ah, well, I shall have to go to London, I suppose.—What's this? 'Sandston should be our next try.' "

"Sandston? How strange!" murmured Ethel, scarcely aware that the words had passed her lips.

Then she remembered, with a sigh and a

blush, who she was, and what was her real position in the High Tor household.

"I think it is time for us to go in now," she said, looking round to Lady Alice.

"One moment!" said Lord Harrogate. "These are startling times, Miss Gray, and I need no excuse for believing, with those bawlers yonder at Carbery, that there may be some foundation for the report that my unhappy kinswoman's child was *not* drowned in the Thames, but lives, it may be, to this day. Only I revolt against the theory that bids me hail her in the shape of Miss Willis. I would much rather believe that I see in you the missing Helena."

"And that would be so nice!" exclaimed Lady Alice, clapping her hands.

Ethel was for a moment dazzled. We

never quite know on what our belief is based, from what subtle storehouses and recondite nooks of the mind we gradually extract and blend the garnered facts, guesses, and impressions which make up the sum of our knowledge. Vague, formless memories, early day-dreams, wild conjectures, came crowding back upon her; and for a moment she was almost inclined to regard herself as the missing link in the ancestral chain of the De Vere succession.

But she had sense and firmness enough to reply: "What you talk of, Lord Harrogate, might be very pretty in a novel, but in real life we do not have coincidences of this sort. Depend upon it, Ethel Gray will be Ethel Gray to the end of the chapter; and your governess, Alice dear, not your

cousin, so that she is obliged to remember the school-room and our early dinner and the afternoon lessons."

By this time the Earl had somehow heard the tidings of Sir Sykes Denzil's illness, which had flown, as bad news is reputed to fly, from Carbery Chase to High Tor. He came to the hall-door to meet his son. "This is a shocking business! They have murdered poor Sir Sykes among them!" he said warmly.

"It is an unfortunate affair altogether," answered Lord Harrogate.

"That he should have become the partisan of an impostor! Of a creature who is no more of the De Vere blood than she is own sister to the Emperor of China!" exclaimed the Earl, whose honest mind was now stirred

"I never wish," he said, "to punish gipsy crones for all the virtues of silly serving-wenches, and to be expected to do honour to such a one as this Miss Vills, with that buccarooning reputation for her Ladyship's prime-minister, I suppose. To my mind, the whole thing is a really pity."

The Earl of Warrhampton was one of the least suspicious and most placable of men. He had never resented the cruel justice by which old Lord Harrogate had left the great family property away from the De Vere name and blood: but this audacious attempt to appropriate the honours of his ancient stock was too much for his patience.

"Of course the child's death was never proved," said Lord Harrogate diplomatically.

“Let the child come forward then,” answered his father with unwonted irritation ; “but do not let her come in the shape of Miss Slyboots there. And, as for the ruffian who backs her claim, if ever there was a neck moulded by Nature for a hempen cravat, it is that of Hull, Hole, Hold, or whatever they call the fellow.”

“Can’t he be punished—I should think he might,” said Lady Alice, with that intense earnestness which belonged to her years — “for something he did out there ?”

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as a malevolent Sindbad the Sailor may have appeared to some Leila or Fatima in her peaceful Arab home, and had she been a jurorress impanelled to try him, her verdict would certainly have been for heavy irons and a cell in Newgate.

The Earl was an experienced county magistrate, and his good-humour was at once restored by his daughter's speech.

"No chance of it, Alice," he said, smiling. "Trouble enough it is in these days to deal with our British rogues whose picking and stealing have been conveniently limited by the compass of the four seas. I am afraid that Mr. Hold, unless he be ill-advised enough to commit some offence where the Queen's writ runs, may elude Nemesis yet. But as regards the recognition by the House of

Lords that this Miss Willis is poor Clare's child, that is another affair, and I at any rate shall oppose it to the utmost of my power."

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE 'OLD VINE.'

"NAME of Parsons, sir? Certainly. Mr. Parsons, which he is an old customer, uses this house, and just now he has the parlour to himself." So said the ringleted barmaid of the *Old Vine* in Walsall Street, Euston Road, as she emerged from her bower of bliss, festooned with jugs, lemons, bright glasses, and burnished pewter, and bristling with the ivory-tipped handles of beer-engines, to show the stranger who had inquired for Mr. Parsons, and was presumed his friend, the way to the *Old Vine's* best parlour.

A notable hostelry in its way was this same *Old Vine*, the very name of which had a respectable flavour of quasi-antiquity, for it takes some years to grow a vine, and a good many more before that twining and tough-limbed plant can be said to have attained to the dignity of age. Probably some ancient inn or tavern had been standing on that site when the Oxford fields and Gallows meadows, with the miry lanes adjacent, were yet a happy hunting-ground for bludgeon-bearing footpads, and unsafe lounging-places for the prudent citizen coming home from his excursion to the suburbs.

The *Old Vine*, whether an aboriginal house of entertainment or not, had never laid itself out for the modern adornments that are

usually thought necessary to attract custom. There was no fine front decorated with mock-marble pilasters, paint, and gilding, no display of plate-glass, no imposing array of lamps. The small-paned windows and white walls were inscribed in narrow letters with quaint legends having reference to 'neat cordials,' 'fine wines,' and the like, which almost seemed to take the observant wayfarer back to the Tom-and-Jerry days. And there was one announcement less immediately intelligible, which seemed to possess a semi-religious character, since it hinted at "An Ordinary on Sundays at two o'clock."

The *Old Vine*, dingy, commonplace, and unattractive as it might appear, never seemed to lack custom. In its unpretentious way

it throve remarkably well. It was not a 'brewer's house,' and as such was freed from the vassalage to which many a public of comelier aspect has to submit. But although the *Old Vine* bought its beer where it liked, instead of being constrained to promulgate the strong ale, mild ale, and 'entire' of one mighty vatocrat, the *Old Vine* did a good business in the blood of John Barleycorn. There were landlords hard by whose sumptuous establishments out-glittered the modest outside of the *Old Vine*, yet who spoke of the house with a resentful respect. "Draw a power of beer, they do, let alone sperrits. Ten pound, oftener twelve ! And they buy as they choose. It's along of the Staffordshire-men that stand by 'em so."

That was the secret of the flourishing of

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placency. "The wonder of the thing is of course the pencil-marks, so easy to be rubbed out, should have lasted so long, or leastways so it seems. We of the Force know by experience what a good friend to us the pencil is, in the way of leaving its writing plain to be read, when ink, on account of the acids, has faded from damp and mildew. Once we got a verdict against a forger, all because of his betting-book and the pencilled entries in it, months after he had chucked it and all his papers into the Thames that ran by his villa at Roehampton."

Inspectors of even the detective branch of that small and active army of police which intervenes between quiet householders and the predatory classes, share the common

to honest wrath. "We punish gipsy crones who tell the fortunes of silly serving-wenches, and we are expected to do honour to such a one as this Miss Willis, with that bucca-peering vagabond for her Ladyship's prime-minister, I suppose. To my mind, the whole thing is a rascally plot."

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weaknesses of mortal men. Lord Harrogate saw that this superior officer of the drilled and disciplined constabulary was as vain of his discovery as though he had been the finder of a new metal or a new star, and resolved not to cloud the policeman's joy by any depreciatory criticism.

"It is lucky," he said, "that the card came into good hands—professional hands, I mean. A layman like myself could have made nothing of it."

"Umph ! perhaps not!" said the inspector, coughing behind his broad hand. "Always excepting Mr. Bobbins. — Your Lordship never heard of Mr. Bobbins? That's odd; but to be sure he did his best to keep out of the newspapers; and the reporters, except on grand occasions at the Central Criminal

Court, didn't so much as hint at him. Gentleman of property, my Lord, was Mr. Bobbins, who took to police business as a duck takes to the water, out of pure love for it. Wonder-ful captions he made, of burglars chiefly ; so that our best officers got to be a'most jealous, they did, of Mr. Bobbins."

"He grew tired of it perhaps—or married, and found other objects of interest?" asked Lord Harrogate, amused at the policeman's enthusiasm.

"Died, my Lord," answered Drew solemnly. "Never recovered a trial at the Old Bailey in which he was a witness, and the cross-examination by Mr. Serjeant Blathers, who was counsel for the prisoner. 'It's my nature,' said poor Bobbins, 'to attend to

matters of this sort, and I can't help it.' 'Then, sir,' roared Blathers (the Serjeant was a big red-faced man with a bullying manner, and a voice that made you wince, whoever you were), 'you are no better than a monomaniac, and ought to be locked up at once. Your friends, if you have any friends, should know better than to leave you at large, Mr. Bobbins. An amateur thief-taker! Before long, perhaps we shall come across an amateur hangman. Who can tell, Mr. Bobbins, what your next craze may be?'—It broke poor Bobbins's heart. It did indeed, my Lord. Never held up his head, once, since that day."

Lord Harrogate waited to give time for the subsidence of the inspector's natural emotions at the recollection of the untimely end of

this brilliant volunteer, and then recurred to the card.

"The word 'Sandston,'" he said, "I should take to be a hurried memorandum. I agree with you, however, that it points out the most probable field for a fresh discovery."

By this time Inspector Drew, with whom the melting mood was rare and of brief duration, was himself again, and he proceeded, glancing now and then at the card, as if to make sure that it had not evaporated into thin air, to express his opinion on the subject.

"We guess, don't we, my Lord," he began argumentatively, "that whoever did the actual job of stealing the child—since I suppose we may take it for granted she was

stolen—was a commonish sort of person, not too well educated, now ? ”

Lord Harrogate agreed with this preliminary proposition. “ Gipsies, chimney-sweepers, and beggars,” he remarked, smiling, “ are the only kidnappers of children of whom I have heard since the days of the Burkers, and none of these can be suspected of much erudition.”

“ But neither a chimney-sweep nor a cadger nor yet a gipsy,” returned the inspector with perfect seriousness, “ wrote down that word in pencil. It was a gentleman wrote that. And I should like to know, my Lord, if not too great a liberty, whether your Lordship never met with a handwriting similar to that before ? ”

Now, it had instantly, on seeing the

pencilled word, occurred to Lord Harrogate that it was in the handwriting of Sir Sykes Denzil ; but he felt as yet unwilling to mention the name of the presumed writer. Inspector Drew, who was quick to read faces as well as half-effaced inscriptions, did not press the question, but proceeded: "You see, my Lord, all turns on whether the job was a put-up job or not. I think it was. There are vagrants of course who would make no bones of snapping up a pretty bit of a child likely to bring 'em in money, if they met with her in a lane somewhere, alone. But they'd be scared by the idea of a real quality child, at play in her mamma's own garden, where, for aught they knew, maids and men might come running at a cry. It took a determined sort of chap,

with a strong motive for what he was about, to risk it."

"That motive you conclude was gain, of course?" observed Lord Harrogate, as the detective came to a pause.

"*Must* have been gain," said the inspector dogmatically. "And tidily too, the work must have been paid for. Now, it seems to me that this little word 'Sandston' was pencilled down on the scrap of card by the paymaster of the actual scoundrel who undertook the business. Your Lordship can guess why?"

"I suppose, to refresh the man's memory, in case he should forget the name of the place whither he was to convey the stolen child," said Lord Harrogate, after a moment's thought. "We are assuming of course that the infant was carried off, not drowned."

"Well—we may, my Lord," answered the inspector, with the assurance of an expert. "It wouldn't be easy, really now, to get any man, even the worst, to kill a smiling, innocent bit of a thing of that age; indeed it wouldn't. There's an old hag here and there," he added, "would be less particular; but whoever scaled that terrace-bank from the river must have been an active man. No; the little one left that place safe and sound, rely on it."

"And you think," said Lord Harrogate, as a host of sudden hopes crowded on him, "that we shall find her at Sandston, or a clue to her?"

"Find a clue to her, my Lord, we almost certainly shall," returned the detective earnestly, "if we do but look long enough

and hard enough. Murder will out, they say ; and not that alone, but other crime, of whatever sort it may be. If your Lordship will be at the Shoreditch Station at 9.30 to-night, we can travel down to Sandston—not together, though—and set about our inquiries in the morning without loss of time.”

CHAPTER IX.

AT SANDSTON.

“THE *Great Eastern*, sir, I suppose?” said the railway porter who shouldered Lord Harrogate’s portmanteau, as soon as the few passengers for Sandston had been set down on the brick platform; and never having been in Sandston before, and perceiving by the man’s confident tone that a voyager of his appearance was expected to put up at the gaunt new railway hotel that towered contiguous to the station, Lord Harrogate submitted to manifest destiny. There was a town omnibus, wherein Inspector Drew

took his seat, and was borne rattling away to the *King's Arms Commercial Inn*, in company with other two second-class travellers, whose luggage mainly consisted of black sample-boxes strongly strapped; and then the majority of the gas-burners were turned down, since nobody else was to be looked for in Sandston, which lay on a loop-line, that night.

Early on the next morning Lord Harrogate was astir, and sallying out, made his way to the edge of the crumbling cliff on which stood Sandston, or more correctly, such portions of the old East Anglian borough as had not yet been swallowed up by the all-devouring sea, which heaved and growled, as though hungering for fresh conquests, at the foot of the friable sand-

stone rock that its waves beat against twice a day. Sandston, in monkish chronicle, is spoken of as a port of some note ; but the same change in the coast-line that had swept away its parish church and two hundred roofs besides, had silted up the harbour, whence fifty barks used to set sail for the Baltic or the North Sea. A quiet, dull, dead-alive town, of a class not uncommon in the east and south of England, was Sandston of the grass-grown streets, lying amidst fens and sandy commons and shallow 'broads,' that were the shrunken remnants of huge meres, haunted by white-winged armadas of screaming wild-fowl, and thickets of alder and pollard willows, and windmills—quite a Dutch landscape ; save that instead of cunningly constructed dykes, the

land was guarded from the encroaching sea by the less sure defence of the soft cliff, that every year yielded up some yards of soil.

Some efforts had been made, once and again, to galvanize Sandston into life as a fashionable watering-place ; and crescents and terraces, not seldom unfinished, and isolated villas in gardens screened from the salt breeze by tall hedges of the waving tamarisk, were dotted about. There were libraries, a bazaar, a penitential-looking row of bathing-machines, and other necessary adjuncts of a watering-place, inclusive of donkeys and Bath-chairs. But the frequenters of Sandston-on-Sea were few, and of a languid character, that contributed little to the animation of the spot.

There was a beauty, of a sort, about the

place, when once the eyes and the mind had been averted from the gaunt skeletons of the unfinished houses; the side-saddled donkeys drawn up in line with an array of goat-carriages and open flies, drawn by starveling steeds; the tawdry posters of 'the Great Bounce,' whose forthcoming entertainment of buffo-singing was to enliven the Assembly Rooms; and the other trite features of a bathing resort. The crags were low, and the caves with which the cliffs were honey-combed lacked the grandeur of the basaltic grottoes of Antrim; but the shapes they took were sufficiently wild, and suggestive of smugglers' lairs and of earlier days, when more dangerous visitors than the fair trader were not uncommon on that exposed coast. Far and majestic rolled

away to north and east the vast expanse of the German Ocean, smiling and dimpling in the sun, as it had smiled and dimpled a thousand years before, when the oar-blades of Danish pirates had tossed the diamond spray in air at every stroke, and the church bells had tolled, and the beacons been got ready on headland and down, to give warning that the Norse were near. The spreading sands were as smooth as a marble floor, mottled in places by the irregular mosaic of tinted pebbles, shells, and weed, and backed by dense beds of the hardy 'marum' grass, encouraged as the best of safeguards against the invading sea. Lord Harrogate perhaps looked on all these things with an interest which an ordinary tourist could not have been expected to evince, in consider-

ation of the fact that here had been spent the earlier years of her whom he loved. These wave-worn cliffs, this storm-beaten beach, this range of level sand, reached by flights of mouldering steps that led down from the steep cliff top—how often must Ethel Gray's eyes have rested on these objects, which he now beheld for the first time! For her sake, he viewed Sandston with a tolerant approval, in its picturesque and social aspects, which he might not otherwise have been sufficiently eclectic in his tastes to have extended towards it. He went back to his hotel, and having ordered and eaten his breakfast, went forth again, this time taking the hollow way, bordered by high paved foot-walks on each side, which led into the town.

There is a curious family likeness between these sleepy old English towns, which almost makes us feel familiar with a place so much akin to places we have known elsewhere. There are the same bright brass plates on the doors of the same garden-fronted houses of mellowed brick, to tell us how comfortably live the lawyer and the principal doctor, the local banker, and the miller, whose ornamental garden, with its weeping-willows overhanging the silvery mill-dam, is the prettiest sight to be seen on entering by the old London road. That dog reposing snugly on the sunny strip of pavement must surely be gifted with preternatural powers of somnolency, for you seem to remember him as sleeping thus confidingly, in much such a spot, when you were a boy at school. The

little shops, with their small-paned windows and low doorways, appear to offer buns and cattle-medicines and goose-quill pens and gown-pieces of the kind that were in demand some forty years ago. The coach will probably soon jolt in, bringing with it the day before yesterday's metropolitan gossip, and the shrill shriek of the locomotive is resented as an anachronism.

Lord Harrogate presently recalled to mind that he had not journeyed to Sandston with archæological intent, but on a quest that, he was aware, to eight out of ten of the men he knew on the Pall-Mall pavement or in the hunting-field, would appear quixotic. And he dreaded lest he should have allowed what he wished to overpower his usually clear intellect in this matter of the search

for the supposed heiress of the De Veres. He was carrying on the hunt, as he knew, with quite other motives than the stern sense of justice which had prompted his earliest endeavours. Sir Sykes, innocent or guilty, had virtually passed beyond human jurisdiction. Earthly blame or praise could be as nothing to the half-animate creature on his couch of suffering at Carbery Chase.

But Lord Harrogate had of late permitted himself to hope that by a coincidence, strange but not impossible, a rainbow bridge might be flung across the gulf which separated his position in life from that of his sister's governess—that beautiful Ethel whose sweet face rose up so often before his mental gaze. He scarcely dared to acknowledge to himself his own thoughts, so well aware was he

of the tendency to self-deception which is common to us all ; but none the less did he feel spurred on by a double purpose as he pursued the inquiry on which he had entered.

At the corner of the narrow High Street, Lord Harrogate encountered Inspector Drew.

"You are early, my Lord," said the detective, carrying a ready fore-finger to his hat. "But I have not had my eyes shut either, since they began to open places of business, specially in the licensed victualling line, here in Sandston. This aint a place though for private conversation, my Lord. I see heads peeping over half-a-dozen window-blinds already, but Tontine Street here will answer better."

Tontine Street indeed was lonely enough to have served for a rendezvous in which

Talleyrand and Metternich and Pozzo di Borgo, suspicious statesmen as they were, might have conferred together without dread of diplomatic eavesdroppers. Six giant houses, empty, and with dabs of white paint in the centre of each of their blank windows, stood together on one side, and four on the other of this broad thoroughfare, in which the deep dust of sultry summer lay unscored by hoof or wheel. Farther on, ghastly pits and miscellaneous mounds of rubbish told of toils left incomplete, contracts broken off, insolvency, neglect, decay. Whoever they were who supplied the capital for the commencement of this dreary Tontine Street, sorry was the harvest of profit which seemed likely to devolve upon 'the longest liver' of that speculative Company.

"You have been beating up the inns then, Mr. Drew?" said Lord Harrogate, when he found himself, like the Last Man but One, amidst the ghostly echoes and solemn silences of Tontine St. "Have you had any success?"

"Well, my Lord," returned the inspector in a tone of expostulation, "it's too soon to look for much of that. I'm not a sportsman myself—other fish, says your Lordship, to fry—but I do believe the fox shows the stuff he's made of before he loses his brush, according to the coloured prints in a window in Waterloo Place, S.W., which taught me, atween ourselves, all *I* know about it. Now if this child we are looking for was brought here by a stranger or strangers, they must, in reason, have put up at some house of public entertainment, more or less."

"How, more or less?" asked Lord Harrogate with a smile.

"Why, my Lord," said the inspector, "there's private lodgings, a deal safer in some respects, for those who have anything to hide and money in their pockets, than any hotel big or little. Parties in a hurry, however, don't often take lodgings right off, and when they do, they leave more trace behind 'em than they meant to leave. Then there are the common lodging-houses, ranging from three pence to six, where the accommodation's rough, I needn't say, but where it's a point of honour not to split upon a customer. Then we rise to the licensed to be drunk on the premises, which often keep 'good beds' in an upper window; and then to publics calling themselves inns,

and next to inns that ape at being hotels ; and lastly, to hotels, and no mistake. That's about the total," added the inspector, summing up.

"Which variety, to your mind, here in Sandston, appears the most likely?" demanded Lord Harrogate.

"Just what I've been turning over, and turning over this hour past," said the detective candidly ; "and, my Lord, I do assure you I felt inclined to sky a halfpenny and stand by the toss, whether to try the *Robin Hood* or a much more gen-teel place of business, the *Dolphin*. The *Robin Hood* is a big public-house at the corner of Horse-market Street yonder, and the folks who keep it don't look the sort who ask troublesome questions. Something of a smuggling

flavour, of a mail-coach flavour, of a Blue House at electioneering times, there is about the *Robin Hood*. It is a tumble-down, roomy, seen-better-days kind of establishment, that might tempt queer people on a queer errand, certainly."

"And the *Dolphin*?" asked Lord Harrogate, as his companion's discourse ended.

"Why, the *Dolphin*," said the inspector, who was evidently an enthusiastic classifier of hotels, "is just the very reverse of all that. Quiet, tidy, but maybe a little mouldy; it stands in Paston Street, just off the upper end of High Street, and has a big garden and a big courtyard, and stabling enough for a troop of cavalry. Depend on it, when the gentry of the neighbourhood used to come into Sandston, once on a time,

it was at the *Dolphin* they put up their carriages and ordered dinner, and a bottle of the blue seal, and another of the yellow I think you'll agree with me, my Lord, that the likeliest cover to draw is the *Dolphin*, all things considered, and I think you'll guess why."

Lord Harrogate merely nodded, however, in good-humoured assent; and the inspector, as he led the way up the steep and narrow High Street, the stony kernel whence had sprung the town, proceeded to answer his own question.

"If one of the parties was—as ten to one he was—a gentleman born and bred, he'd have felt more at his ease in a house that he could see was frequented by gentlefolks, my Lord. Not only he'd have been sickened

for the supposed heiress of the De Veres.
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with quite other motives than the stern
sense of justice which had prompted his
earliest endeavours. Sir Sykes, innocent or
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at the rags and the dirt and the bad air of the cheap travellers' houses and beer-shops, and so forth, but he'd have felt like a fish out of water in the *King's Arms*, where I put up. Bless you, I've known those who were up to any game, till it came to soiling their fingers, or eating off a dirty plate, as one may say, and then they were at a dead-lock in a moment.—Here's the *Dolphin*, my Lord; though we must not take it amiss if we don't learn much, after so many years."

CHAPTER X.

MRS. DIVER'S REMINISCENCES.

ARRIVING in front of the *Dolphin*, which still designated itself as 'hotel and posting-house,' and of which in old times the most lucrative part of the business had probably been that which was mixed up with bright-coloured jackets and mahogany-topped boots, Lord Harrogate hesitated. He did not quite like, accompanied by a policeman in plain clothes, to ring the bell, and ask for information concerning the events of almost twenty years before. Nevertheless he rang the bell. "I

wish," he said, "to see the landlord or the landlady."

"Mrs. Diver, sir, is it?" demanded the goggle-eyed waiter, neat enough as to his black raiment, clean enough as to his napkin and cravat, who answered the summons, but a Milesian confessed, whose Irishisms were a source of grief to his good mistress. Such as he was, Tim—he heroically repudiated the English diminutive of his Christian name, and stuck to the monosyllable by which he had been called in County Carlow—was the head-waiter of the *Dolphin*. A first-rate town-made waiter was too costly an article for that reduced establishment. Mrs. Diver, worthy soul, would as soon have harboured a Chinese as a German. Were not both foreigners alike? So she chose an

Irishman, and drilled him as best she might. Mrs. Diver herself, when the visitors had been inducted into her particular parlour, was seen to be precisely that typical landlady of which it is a pity that the British Museum should not secure a stuffed specimen before it becomes extinct. Fat, fair, and comely she had been, no doubt, at the date concerning which she had to be questioned ; and now she was as a photograph of her former buxom self, a little less fat, a trifle less firm of substance, with cheeks slightly thinner, and the marks that Time's rude finger had traced around her eyes a little deeper than had then been the case.

A good manager, a pattern landlady according to her code of manners, with a fine memory for the names of the young

ladies and the ages of the young gentlemen belonging to the county families whose patronage was her pride, had Mrs. Diver ever been. Her kind thoughtful face must have been amongst the pleasantest of the early recollections of many a youngster doomed to serve, and possibly to die, in the heavy heat and amid the parching dust-storms of India. Her bills were not too long. The old *Dolphin* had never been a dear hotel ; but Mrs. Diver must have made money, for she weathered the bad times that followed her halcyon period of prosperity, and kept the ancient sign of the ancient house still aloft.

Mrs. Diver was more flustered than she cared to own, when once she had been given to understand the rank and condition of

the two 'gentlemen from London' who desired a few minutes' conversation with her. With squires and their squireses, with bishops and their ladies, archdeacons and their wives, and baronets and their dames, her way of life had made her tolerably familiar. But she had only twice spoken with a lord, and with a detective—never. And of the two strangers, although she revered the lord, she dreaded the detective the most, crediting the inspector with a more than human insight into those cupboards in which we all keep, under lock and key, the proverbial skeleton.

"You see, my Lord," said Mrs. Diver, with a little cough—the cough deprecatory — "there have been so many children brought here—more especially years ago,

when, I don't mind saying in confidence, business was brisker, very much brisker than I find it now."

In uttering this sentence she glanced twice at the policeman ; first, as though he might possibly have catalogued all the children who had ever occupied a dimity-curtained cot at the *Dolphin*, and secondly, as if his professional vision could pierce the marbled binding of her ledger, and gauge her gains and losses with the precision of an accountant engaged to 'wind up' the affairs of the family hotel.

"My question," said Lord Harrogate, "referred to a particular year [mentioning the date], and to a child's having been brought here under circumstances somewhat unusual."

"Which, from information I have re-

ceived," hinted Inspector Drew, "I believe to have been the case."

"A little boy, or a little girl?" asked Mrs. Diver, knitting her brows, as visibly ransacking the storehouse of her memory.

"A little girl certainly," returned Lord Harrogate.

"Ah, my Lord, there it is!" was Mrs. Diver's provoking response; "because, if it had been a boy, there was one brought here that very year, I think—but it's in black and white in my books—all alone, with three foreign servants, two of them heathens from India, and the third a Frenchman, who similarly wore gold rings, only his were in his ears, and theirs in their noses—Master John Budgeon — papa supposed to be a Nabob enormously rich—sent here for the

sea-bathing, and having water on the brain, and a head as big as four, died, poor lad, at the *Dolphin*, No. 23 — which was much regretted.”

“Your memory, I find, Mrs. Diver, is an excellent one,” said Lord Harrogate. “Can you not tax it still further, and remember another child — a girl this time, who was your guest in that same year, somewhat oddly?”

The landlady shook her head. “Nothing odd,” she said demurely, “comes here, preferring other establishments where the ways may be better suited to taste. Though, in my father’s time—for we have kept this house, my Lord, for three generations—I can just remember Mr. Romeo Coates, though I believe such was not his Christian

name, with the gold cocks on the blinkers of his horses, and the splash-board, and the hammer-cloth, quite a sight to see—eccentric, they said, but a capital customer. No; I recollect no other child in particular that year except Miss Ada, Sir Thomas Claypole's youngest daughter, that came to Sandston with her parents after the measles; and—let me see, yes, Miss Gray—Ruth, as they called her then—Ethel, as we called her afterwards. *She* came to Sandston that year.”

“Who called her Ruth?” exclaimed Lord Harrogate, forgetting his diplomacy in his astonishment, while the inspector screwed up his mouth as though whistling silently. Mrs. Diver elevated her broad eyebrows a very little.

“Dear me,” she said, with a quick glance at her visitors, “I hope nothing is intended as to the dear young lady that she might not like?”

“Nothing, nothing; I assure you of that, Mrs. Diver,” said Lord Harrogate; and Mrs. Diver took another look at the handsome eager face of the young man, and gave full credence to what he said. Her womanly interest in matches actual or problematic made her sharp-sighted in such a case, and enabled her to conjecture with tolerable accuracy how matters stood.

“It’s a wonderful chance for her, without a penny to her fortune, and husbands growing scarcer, they say, every day. A lord! But if he were a prince, and could make her a queen one day, he’d not be a bit too good

for her," thought Mrs. Diver, as she went on slowly and smilingly: "They called her Ruth at first; so no doubt 'tis her own old name, though she has very likely forgotten it; and I for one was careful never to call her anything but Miss Ethel, to please Mrs. Keating, our vicar's wife, who adopted her, that is, after Mrs. Linklater, good soul, was taken from us."

The inspector's note-book was out by this time and up his sleeve, in which awkward position its owner occupied himself in stealthily taking notes.

"Of Mrs. Keating, the wife of your clergyman here, and a college friend of my father's, I have heard before," said Lord Harrogate. "I think, but am not sure, that I have also heard of Mrs. Linklater—as a

mere name, however, which conveys no very distinct ideas."

"Mrs. Linklater, my Lord," said Mrs. Diver, smoothing out with her fat fore-finger a crease in her well-worn gown of black silk, "was the landlady of a lodging-house here in Sandston, No. 9, Bouverie Villas, as respectable a church-going charitable woman as ever I knew, and the widow of a customs-officer, who missed his footing on the cliff-path one moonless night. And when this Mr. Gray—from Australia, so I understood, and early left a widower—with this one little child to care for, came and stopped at the *Dolphin*, and then inquired for good lodgings, kept by careful people, with whom he could leave his little daughter during an occasional absence which business

would render necessary, what could I do better than to recommend Mrs. Linklater's apartments?"

The substance of what Mrs. Diver had to tell was briefly this. At the precise period concerning which information was desired, there had arrived in Sandston a gentleman named Gray, a widower, with one child under his care, and who, by his own account, had newly returned from Australia. A handsome, somewhat melancholy gentleman, and apparently well to do in the world, was this Mr. Gray. He attracted much notice, and a good deal of sympathy, during his short stay at the quiet East Anglian bathing-place. He still wore mourning, as deep as the new black frock and black ribbons of the tiny baby-girl whose waxen

fingers rested passively in the strong hand that supported her weak steps.

“The little thing”—such was the remark of a critical old maid—“does not seem to take very much to her papa.”

And such was certainly the case. The orphaned child did not cling to her father's caressing hand, meet his kind glance, or nestle beside him, as other bereaved little ones so often learn to do. No man can ever be to a child what a mother is; but children are usually wondrous quick to find out those who love them. As it was, small Ruth Gray had a strange, scared look, would glance around her as if in piteous search for some lost object, and would then fall to weeping, and need kisses and soothing words—seldom lack-

ing, so naturally did her motherless state knock at the door of all women's hearts—to lull her grief to sleep.

Meanwhile, nothing could be more satisfactory than the conduct of Mr. Gray. He did not indeed hire, as a wealthier man would have done, a trained nurse for the child. But he engaged Mrs. Linklater's somewhat expensive apartments for two months certain, and assented to that excellent lady's suggestion as to enlisting what she called 'a cheap girl' as Ruth's attendant.

"I'll be head-nurse, I'm sure, sir, most willing," said soft-hearted Mrs. Linklater, who idolised children, and who had none of her own left since the sad day on which her one bold, fair-haired boy was drowned by the upsetting of a pleasure-yawl.

The gossips of Sandston did not see very much, after all, of the disconsolate widower from Australia. On the sixth day, whether by letter or by telegram, Mr. Gray was summoned away in hot haste. Purse in hand, he announced his intended absence for ten days. Ruth must, of course, be left under Mrs. Linklater's wing. Mr. Gray paid for everything in advance, and with a liberality which the landlady's intimate friends, assembled round the social teapot in the back-parlour, declared to be that of a true gentleman.

It was often remembered in after years, that parting of the widower from his little daughter, and how he had stooped to pat the soft cheek of the large-eyed child, who had shrunk, palpably shrunk, away from

him, holding tight to the skirts of honest Mrs. Linklater. The landlady had felt compelled to apologise for the undutiful coldness of her orphaned charge. "Poor darlings, they're often so," she had said. And then grave Mr. Gray had smiled a little oddly, and had said a word or two of leave-taking, and left the house.

Mr. Gray's absence lasted more than ten days. It lasted more than ten weeks, ten months, ten years. Sandston saw the Australian widower no more. A London solicitor wrote formally and frigidly to say that he was commissioned by his client, Mr. Gray, unavoidably recalled to the antipodes, to make certain half-yearly payments for the maintenance and education of little Miss Gray. Many an honest woman

in Mrs. Linklater's position would have resented the stratagem, only too palpable, by which she had been tricked into taking the charge of a stranger's child. But Mrs. Linklater was not hard-natured, and to have been angry with Mr. Gray's innocent little girl because of Mr. Gray's duplicity was an altitude of austere virtue beyond her reach.

How the deserted child grew up beautiful, lovable, and loved by such few friends as sympathy for her desolate state, and none the less for her winning ways, procured her—how the lawyer ceased to remit money, and Mr. Gray kept a silence never to be broken—how Mrs. Linklater died, and Mrs. Keating took home the child to the parsonage, calling her Ruth no longer, but Ethel, in memory of a little daughter of her own,

loved and lost—and how, finally, when Mrs. Keating was ordered to the south of France by her physician, Miss Gray had sought and obtained the situation of a village schoolmistress—these things did Mrs. Diver copiously narrate.

Then Lord Harrogate tried the effect of a few questions, the inspector sitting silent and watchful, with much the same expression on his face which we may notice on that of an intelligent collie-dog while his master is bargaining in fair or market concerning the fleeces or the mutton of those sheep that weigh so heavily, as regards their safe keeping, on the dog's sensitive conscience.

Was Mr. Gray alone when he first appeared in Sandston? Yes; to the best of

Mrs. Diver's knowledge, quite alone. He brought no servant with him, and was quite unaccompanied, save by the child. Could Mrs. Diver remember to have noticed at that time any rough, suspicious-looking stranger hanging about the place? Or to have heard that Mr. Gray had been seen conferring with such a person during his short stay? Again the reply was in the negative.

“Bad people as well as good people,” said the landlady of the *Dolphin*, “come to Sandston, as to other places, and we have incurred loss at the hotel, as often occurs in our line, in consequence of such. There was a seafaring fellow prying about this very year in our yard and tap-room and where not, who meant no good, unless his looks belied him; and very careful I

bade the barmaid and waiter be with the spoons, until he took his ugly face away with him. But Mr. Gray was too much the gentleman to consort with such."

At mention of a seafaring man of sinister mien who had been lurking about the *Dolphin* that very year, the inspector had pricked up his ears with canine sharpness, while Lord Harrogate inquired whether Mrs. Diver had ever before seen the person of whom she spoke, and whether she had heard his name.

"Well, no, my Lord," said Mrs. Diver, after a moment's consideration; "I can't call to mind that I did. And as for his name, why, I had the curiosity, for a wonder, to ask it of Will Ostler, that acknowledged having been treated by him to

beer and likewise spirits, for he was always talking with such of our servants as would listen to him. But nobody knew his name; and if asked about it, he used to answer with a laugh that it was 'Hans in Kelder,' and that he had been long enough among the Dutchmen to have learned that 'Hans in Kelder' was a good name to sail under in strange latitudes."

"It's a common answer among foreign seamen, down by the Docks, who don't choose to give their real names," remarked the detective, in explanation. "'Jack in the Cellar' would be the plain English of it."

Dr. and Mrs. Keating, it appeared, were still on the continent; nor did it seem likely that their presence in Sandston would have added anything material to the stock of facts

already gleaned. Opinions, in the place, had been divided with regard to Mr. Gray, one set of gossips holding him to have been a heartless and unprincipled man ; while another more charitably inclined to the belief that he had died in the course of his wanderings, and that his non-return from the antipodes was due to the fact that he no longer lived to revisit his native country and claim his daughter.

“ I recollect, as if it were yesterday,” said the landlady, who was pleased to have a sympathetic listener, and flattered that the listener should be of patrician rank, “ when first I set eyes on Mr. Gray, and the little angel, with her lovely little face all scared and wonder-stricken, as one may say. She took to me pretty soon, the darling—children

mostly do, I'm glad to say ; but she seemed as though her natural playfulness was frightened away, perhaps by the journey and the strange places, and I could not get her to smile. The first things that seemed to interest her were some great shells that a brother of mine had brought me back from the South Seas, and that were then on the chimney-piece in No. 36—that was the number of the sitting-room."

Lord Harrogate remembered what Ethel had said as to the shells that were among her own earliest memories ; and his heart beat the quicker as Mrs. Diver added, smiling : "Those, my Lord, are the very shells, brought down two months ago, to my parlour here, when we refurnished 36—those big pink ones with the long spikes,

and most of the furniture you see was in No. 36 in the year your Lordship mentioned. This, for instance ;” and as Mrs. Diver spoke, she rose to call attention to a handsome lacquer-work cabinet, the work of some cunning artisan, Japanese or Chinese, in the Far East. “A present too, from my brother Joe, and which old General Tiffin — afterwards Sir Samuel Tiffin — greatly admired when he stayed here. I remember showing the dear child—meaning Miss Gray—the drawers, to amuse her, and how they jumped open when these little ivory knobs were touched.”

And Mrs. Diver, suiting the action to the word, pressed her finger on two or three of the knobs successively, when lo ! open flew shallow drawers of varying width, giving out a

faint scent of sandalwood, and disclosing scraps of lace-work, beads, skeins of Berlin-wool and coloured silk, and other useless relics of the past. Amidst these there appeared an object on which the inspector, mute and vigilant till then, pounced with the swoop of an osprey, and catching it up between his finger and thumb, exclaimed: "By your leave! You'll bear me out, my Lord, and this good lady, too, how this turned up! It was a losing hand, to my mind, when we began to play; but now the game's our own, or I am not Inspector Drew of the detectives. A clear case, to my mind, for any jury."

CHAPTER XI.

FOUND IN THE DRAWER.

THE inspector was a man so reserved, quiet, and common-place of demeanour, that an outburst of excited feeling on his part was by far more impressive on those who witnessed it than would have been the case with nine men out of any ten that could have been chosen at random. All of us have acquaintances from whom no extravagance, whether of diction or of gesture, would surprise us, who stalk the stage, as it were, throughout life's drama, and play some grand heroic part even in what would

Mrs. Diver, seeing how white the detective's rubicund face had suddenly become, suggested 'cordial,' and produced a tempting-looking bottle and glass from a corner cupboard. But Inspector Drew, albeit as fond, in moderation, of a timely portion of good liquor as any other man could be, declined the dram, even though it came under the seductive name of cordial, and rallied his nerves and his wits without alcoholic aid.

"Now, my Lord," he said in a voice that, tremulous at first, grew steadier as he proceeded, "this is one of those chances that one don't tumble upon twice, says you, in a lifetime; and so, as perfect openness is in the nature of things the wisest policy, and this good lady has at heart the interests of the young lady concerned, I make so bold as to

of the room. Lord Harrogate readily divined that some clue to the discovery which it was his purpose to make had been thus unexpectedly found ; while the landlady of the *Dolphin*, with all her sex's sympathy with the marvellous, was ready to give credence to the policeman had he announced himself the finder of Aladdin's Lamp or the long-lost secret of Hermes Trismegistus.

"It's—it's the—other half of the card!" gasped out Inspector Drew faintly, and concealing, by some odd instinct, the prize within his outstretched hand. "I'd not have believed it, not though I'd seen it in print," he added, staggering rather than walking back to his chair and dropping heavily upon it. "This kind of thing takes a man's breath away, it does."

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otherwise be humdrum discussions over their butchers' bills and the accounts of their laundress. Inspector Drew of the detective police was of another composition. His calling brought him into contact with some of the most startling phases of our modern civilisation ; but he endured them, as a rule, with the stoical equanimity of a true philosopher. Wickedness was with him the subject of a professional study, over which he manifested neither pain nor indignation, but the illegal varieties of which it was his duty to bring to condign punishment. It took a good deal to excite the inspector.

The inspector was for once all on fire with an excitement which was not long in communicating itself to the other two occupants

of the room. Lord Harrogate readily divined that some clue to the discovery which it was his purpose to make had been thus unexpectedly found ; while the landlady of the *Dolphin*, with all her sex's sympathy with the marvellous, was ready to give credence to the policeman had he announced himself the finder of Aladdin's Lamp or the long-lost secret of Hermes Trismegistus.

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speak freely of the matter in her presence. I make no doubt too that your Lordship has about you the half-card that has been our guide throughout. Might I ask your Lordship to produce it?"

"Here it is, certainly," said Lord Harrogate, as he laid the moiety of the card on the red cover of Mrs. Diver's loo-table.

"And here's the fellow of it," responded the inspector, as he clapped down beside it another piece of torn card, the jagged edges of which fitted exactly with those of the other half. "There it is!" cried the inspector, hoarse and almost indistinct in his eagerness. "There it is! See! 'Standish' is engraved on the one, and 'Captain F.' on the other. See again, the 'Grena' that goes with the 'dier Guards,' and the exact match

of the bits of pasteboard, every notch and projection corresponding. Why, it's like what it would have been, when there was the old guv'ment lottery, buying two half numbers at random, and finding they made up the one number that won the thirty thousand pound prize! Hurrah!" And by way of a relief to his feelings, the detective flung his hat into the corner of the room, and administered to an unoffending footstool, covered with faded worsted-work, and presented to Mrs. Diver by some patroness from amongst the county families, a kick that sent it noisily into an opposite angle of the parlour. Indifferent to the fate of hat or footstool, the inspector whipped out his horn-mounted arrangement of lenses, and began to survey the newly-found card

with their help, as minutely and as patiently as the curator of an entomological museum could examine the wing-cases and antennæ of a hitherto unique beetle.

“There’s pencil-writing here too,” said the policeman after a lengthened scrutiny; “but it’s too many for me—rubbed as it is. Something like an *H* I fancy I can see.”

Lord Harrogate too thought that one of the almost effaced marks of pencilling on the back of the lately found portion of the card might represent the letter *H*. He thought too that the writer of the disjointed memoranda was identical. Then Mrs. Diver, as a matter of politeness, was requested to take her turn as a decipherer. To the surprise of her visitors, she drew forth from between the leaves of an illustrated book that lay on

the table a piece of silver paper, laid it lightly and smoothly over the card, and then accepted the inspector's proffered glasses.

"I learned this way," she said, "years ago, from an artist gentleman who was here sketching, and meant, I am sure, to remit the amount of his bill, as he promised, from London. It does act in a contrary manner to what may be at first supposed, and—ah! yes, I make out the *H* and an *o* and then *l* and then *d*."

"H-o-l-d! Why, that spells Hold!" cried Lord Harrogate, overjoyed.

"And then follows the name 'Gray—Gray,' written twice, and scored through the first time, and next, much smaller, 'Post-office.' That seems to be all," said Mrs. Diver, wiping the glasses.

Further examination confirmed the landlady's original reading of the almost obliterated pencil-marks.

"Hold—Gray—Gray—Post-office," could yet, though very faintly, be distinguished on the lately recovered portion of the torn card.

"The Post-office, I conclude, may have been used as a concerted place of meeting between the principal in this affair and his agent," said Lord Harrogate; "and the former may have written down not merely the name of his confederate, but that by which he chose to be known in Sandston, the pencilled memorandum being designed to meet no other eye than his own. But as to how the torn card came into the drawer, and how it came to be preserved for so

long, I am somewhat at a loss to conjecture."

"Twenty ways, my Lord, as to the first," said the inspector readily; "such as the card being entangled in the cloak or jacket or something or other the little lady wore. More likely though it was Mr. Gray, as he called himself, let it drop unawares. When men are excited, they are always pulling things out of their pockets restlessly, and don't always put them safe back again. And then, if this good lady has had a habit, and I'm sure a very nice habit, of never throwing away anything that might be useful—why, this card, to judge by the marks on it and this little nick in one corner, which seems as if it had been made with scissors, such as those neat little cards I see

sticking out of the work-basket, having been used for the winding of silk, how easy it might have been picked up from the carpet afterwards, and popped into a drawer without a second look or a second thought, and then used years after, mayhap !”

“The gentleman’s guessed right,” thoughtfully returned Mrs. Diver ; “right, that is as regards a way I’ve got of keeping by me, against a needful day, odds and ends that others would send to the dust-bin. ‘Waste not, want not,’ was the word when I was young ; and I’ve never forgot a saying of my poor mother’s about keeping a thing seven years and then finding a use for it at last. So I may have picked up, when tidying the room, this scrap of torn card, and may have put it from custom in the drawer. Anyhow,

I must have used it, for there's a fluff of the green purse silk I generally put along with red into the purses I made to give away among my friends, when silk purses were the rage."

"It is for me to congratulate myself," said Lord Harrogate, smiling, "that this thrifty practice has enabled me, as I trust under heaven, to right a cruel wrong, and sweep away as with a besom the vile web of fraudulent imposture that dares to bar the way of Truth and Justice."

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER A NEW NAME.

“YOUR duty to leave us, Miss Gray? Your duty to go, without a word of explanation as to the cause of so very singular and unexpected a resolve? Upon my word, young lady, you astonish me! And indeed Lady Wolverhampton did look the very picture of bewilderment. She liked Ethel much, and was aware that her girls liked her more. She was thoroughly satisfied with the ex-mistress of the village school, both as an instructress for Lady Alice and as an inmate of the house at High Tor, and

had often congratulated herself on the chance that had brought Miss Gray beneath her roof. And here was this incomprehensible young person suddenly insisting that she must resign her situation and go away, and only praying that she might not be closely questioned as to the motive for such a resolution.

“Again, dear Lady Wolverhampton, I must beg of you not to ask me why I go,” pleaded Ethel. “Believe me, that it is a sorrowful change for me, and that it has cost me much to bring myself to do what I feel is right.”

And here the tears welled up in her eyes again, and she turned her face away. They were not the first tears shed since last Lord Harrogate had spoken of his love. Through

anxious days and sleepless nights Ethel had been thinking, thinking, and the summary of her reflections was that honour bade her leave the place where she had been so happy, and the family of which the future chief had stooped to woo her for his bride. That, of course, could never be. Yet Lord Harrogate must return ; and should he be of the same mind still, her constancy might not always endure as it had hitherto done, and some word of assent or encouragement be wrung from her lips.

Ethel had made up her mind that she must go ; and all the arguments and entreaties of her friend Lady Maud and her pupil Lady Alice could not dissuade her from her purpose. Then her intention had been made known to the mistress of the

house, and Lady Wolverhampton had in her turn expostulated, but without result.

"I know very well," said she, eyeing Ethel as though she were some natural phenomenon, "that times have altered a good deal; but I can only say that when I was young myself this sort of thing could hardly have happened."

The honest Countess was one of those to whom the rising, or at any rate the junior generation, present a standing puzzle. The days in which she had learned her little chapter of the world's great book had been simpler days than these latter ones, and people's motives, if not purer, were at all events very much more intelligible than they now were. When George the Magnificent reigned over us, when the Sailor-king

hoisted his flag at Windsor, and when Queen Victoria was a young Queen, domestic servitude wore another aspect from that which it now wears. The harsh drill-sergeant Want kept the needy under smarter discipline than modern usages exact. To lose a place was for a servant a misfortune only second to some bodily hurt. And a governess was as much averse to being flung off into the bare, bleak, blank world of poverty as even a servant.

Lady Wolverhampton was vexed and almost angry at Ethel's defection. She knew that young people were nowadays prone to do the oddest things, turning into Sisters of Mercy, shipping for Australia or the Dominion, going off at short notice to some New Zealand dairy, or flinging

themselves on the Indian marriage market, or becoming public performers, or Red Cross Ladies in time of war, or shop-girls, porcelain-painters, lecturesses, or lady-helps. These avenues of employment had all sprung into being since the countess formed her first conceptions of right and wrong ; but it annoyed her that Ethel should take to any of them. She had been so pleased with Ethel—and how now was she to look for a governess to replace her !

“I am quite sure of one thing,” said Lady Maud, whose own eyes were sympathetically moist ; “ whatever Miss Gray’s reason may be, it is a good one, and worthy of one whom we have all loved so well.”

Just then there came the sound of wheels, the barking of dogs, and the clang of a bell.

But these sounds attracted little notice, for now young Lady Alice burst out into a petulant outbreak of grief and anger.

“Miss Gray,” she declared, “was cruel, unfriendly, unjust, and unkind, to go away and leave High Tor and all who cared for her just for a whim. It was scandalous, heartless, unpardonable. Of course, Miss Gray”—for Lady Alice would never, never, never call her Ethel again—“might please herself; but it was none the less cruel conduct, mean, and unworthy of her.”

Having said which, weeping the while, with a flushed cheek and quivering lip, Lady Alice became incoherent in her reproaches, and refused to be comforted, repulsing all Ethel’s well-meant efforts to soothe her.

"I'll never call you Ethel more," cried the indignant girl,—“never, never!”

“I don't think you will, Alice,” answered an unexpected voice—the voice of the Earl himself. The Earl was in the room by this, followed by Lord Harrogate. “I don't think you will,” he repeated, walking straight up to where Ethel stood, and bending down to press his lips, in fatherly fashion, on her white forehead. “I must be the first to kiss you, Helena, my dear, the first to welcome beneath this poor roof of mine, by her true name, the kinswoman who has the best right to its hospitality—poor Cousin Clare's child—Helena, Lady Harrogate!”

No one there present could ever quite clearly recall, in later days, the scene that

followed, the outcries, the astonishment, the excited talk, the marble pallor of Ethel's lovely face, as, with eyes that had grown dim and heart scarce throbbing, she clung to Lady Maud, sobbing in her arms, and murmured again and again the child-like question, "Can it be true—true of *me*?"

It was noticeable that no one, save Ethel herself, for a moment doubted the truth of the good news. Even the Countess put fullest faith in the tale which her son had to tell, in the reality of the discovery which had placed a coronet on the brow of a poor and nameless girl. There was much eager curiosity as to the manner in which the riddle had been solved, but of its solution all were satisfied. It had been far otherwise when

Miss Willis had been ostentatiously proclaimed at Carbery heiress to the De Vere honours. Wonder, suspicion, resentment, had then been the prevalent feelings; but now the Earl's daughters clustered round their new-found cousin with soft words and fond caresses, and vowed that they could never love her better than they had done as dear Ethel, and that she would give, instead of borrowing, lustre to the ancient race to which they all belonged.

And then Lord Harrogate, with a flushed cheek, rallied all his fortitude, since he felt it due to Ethel herself, to say what he had to say publicly. He could not have given a stronger proof of his attachment; for an educated Englishman, even before a kindred audience, has an almost hydrophobic

horror of that dramatic effect which is as mother's milk to the more demonstrative Frenchman.

"Once — twice," he said, going up to Ethel, "I have told you that I loved you, and have asked you to be my wife. If you were, as I learn, about to quit High Tor, and leave the friends that you had made, it was, as I suspect, to shield yourself by absence from addresses which a noble sense of duty urged you to reject. — Father — mother — you hear me — hear me now renew my suit, and crave for our cousin's love, now that the noblest in Europe might acknowledge her for their equal."

Very often, afterwards, Ethel Gray—let us still call her so—attempted to recall to her

memory the precise answer which she had given to Lord Harrogate's public proposal of marriage, but it all seemed like a confused dream of mazy happiness, and all that was certain was that everybody kissed and was kissed by everybody else, and all talked and none listened; and the betrothal was assumed and sanctioned and blessed and joyed over without Ethel's having ever pronounced the actual word 'Yes' from first to last.

"If it is possible to be glad of so terrible a calamity," said the Earl at last, when the conversation became more general, "I cannot but rejoice that I am not to be the means of bringing punishment down upon the head of one with whom I have been on terms of neighbourly amity. To poor Sir Sykes,

in his present helpless state, man's justice signifies little ; yet there is no doubt but that he was the pseudo-widower, the false Mr. Gray, in person, and that the buccaneering rascal Hold has long terrorised over him by working on his fears and his remorse."

"That miserable creature — whom we knew as Miss Willis—what will become of her ?" said Lady Maud, pity and indignation mingling in her voice as she spoke.

"Being of the weaker sex, and presumably a tool of Hold's, she will not be very severely dealt with, I suspect," said Lord Harrogate. "To-night, however, or to-morrow, Inspector Drew will arrive with the necessary warrant from the Home Office, and our pirate friend yonder will probably find Carbery too hot to

hold him much longer. It is odd though, as to Miss Willis, how strangely her face comes back to my recollection as having been seen in a shop somewhere."

"That can scarcely be," said Lady Gladys; "we were all told, when she arrived, that she was fresh from India."

"Yes, Gladys," said the Earl cheerily; "we were told that, and a good deal more; but we were afterwards required to believe that the interesting ward was of our own race, and this was more than we could take on trust. The sooner that clever young lady vanishes from the scene now, the better for her, I should say. Two Kings of Brentford, as the saying is, would not be worse than two Ladies Harrogate, in their own right, in a quiet Devonshire parish; and

Miss Willis and her ally Hold may be assured that the tables have turned at last, and that a heavy day of reckoning is at hand."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DAY OF RECKONING.

THE news of Lord Harrogate's return to High Tor possessed of indisputable proofs of the imposture that had been essayed with reference to the lost heiress of the De Veres ; and that Ethel Gray, not Ruth Willis, was to be recognised as the true Helena, Lady Harrogate, burst upon Carbery Chase like a bomb-shell. The result was as close an approach to a revolutionary outbreak among the servants as could well take place in the orderly household of an English baronet.

The period which succeeded the sudden seizure of Sir Sykes was a kind of interreg-

num, during which the strongest will and the most confident bearing were pretty sure to make themselves obeyed. Jasper, the only son of the now powerless master of the mansion, was unfitted by character and by circumstances to grasp the reins of authority. He was not heir of entail ; he was on dubious terms with his wealthy father ; Sir Sykes might recover sufficiently to execute a will — all of which considerations were potent drawbacks to any assertion of authority on the part of Jasper Denzil.

Strangely enough, the sceptre which Jasper's weakling hands were too tremulous to clutch, fell naturally into those of Ruth Willis. She had been high in the baronet's favour when he was struck down by paralysis ; she was affianced to Captain Jasper as

'My Lady,' a baroness in her own right; and she was acknowledged as a shrewd young person who was capable of holding her own, and perhaps a little more than her own, against all comers.

Ruth ruled at Carbery. It never occurred to Lucy and Blanche Denzil to contest her tacitly assumed superiority. Jasper was her slave, dragged at her gilded chariot-wheels; and Mr. Wilkins the lawyer, after a vain attempt to stem the current, had done homage before the throne of the usurper. It need not be supposed that the submission of the household was a whole-hearted one. Sullen resentment was evoked in more than one quarter by the high-handed manner in which she who had been known as Miss Willis over-rode vested interests and

trampled down cherished abuses. "Set a beggar on horseback!" was the bitter quotation constantly applied to the combined sway of Ruth Willis and Enoch Wilkins.

The only person who felt disposed to resist Ruth's usurpation of authority had been the city lawyer, and he had quickly perceived that his sagest policy was to act as vizier to the imperious little lady who now reigned at Carbery. Mr. Wilkins's own position, based as it had been upon the fears of his employer, had become insecure since Sir Sykes had lain, the breathing effigy of a man, on the bed whence it was improbable that any volition of his own should ever raise him. The solicitor therefore had hailed the rising luminary, and had been satisfied

to take his orders from the so-called peeress and bride-elect.

Then came the news that Ethel Gray's rival claim to be the missing heiress was backed by the whole De Vere family ; that she was to be married to Lord Harrogate ; and that if the long arm of Justice spared Sir Sykes on account of his hopeless condition of bodily health, chastisement was not unlikely to be meted out to the subordinate agents in the plot which was now about to be revealed. Little less than a mutiny occurred at Carbery. There were murmurs loud and long, and Ruth found herself met on every hand by accusing eyes and insolent tongues, a detected cheat, to be stripped of the borrowed plumes in which she had pranked it so bravely.

A strange gathering it was that took place in the great library of Carbery Court, the room that had been Sir Sykes's favourite apartment, and which contained, as has been said, a magnificent window of stained glass, emblazoned with the arms of the former possessors of the mansion. Through this window, which faced westward, streamed the tinted light, falling like the lustre of a rainbow upon the elfish form and face of Ruth Willis as she stood, erect and defiant, confronting the hostile gaze of those around.

Of all those present, Ruth had not a single friend. Her tactics had been those of an audacious self-reliance that conciliated no support, won no sympathy; but pressed on, ever and always, towards the glittering goal. The Denzil girls, who had liked her well at

first, were by her late insolence utterly estranged. Jasper, on whose neck she had set her foot, was coldly and passively her enemy. The ex-captain of cavalry hated, as he loved, in a lukewarm way ; but he was quite shrewd enough to see that the spell was broken which had made him the bond-slave of Miss Willis. It was the unlikeliest thing on earth that Sir Sykes should rally ; and if he did, he would scarcely be active in espousing the cause of one whose fraud had been found out.

Enoch Wilkins, one of the attorneys of Our Lady the Queen, was there also, and he was angrier than those who had more right to be angry. He saw the reins of government slipping from his grasp, and had no kindly feelings towards those whose blatant

self-assertion had brought about the ruin of his projects. The keen, hook-nosed young Jew whom Mr. Wilkins had inducted into the stewardship of the estate was there; and a little way off was to be seen the lowering countenance of the steward whom he had displaced, while the background was filled with tenantry and upper-servants.

Ruth Willis, standing in the full gleam of the dying day, as it poured through the storied panes of the rich window near her, gave proof of a rare courage. Now that she was fairly brought to bay, now that wiles and subterfuge could avail her no more, she turned, like a wounded panther on the hunters, and many of those who loved her least shrank from the scorn and wrath that glistered in her undaunted eyes. "A little

patience, my good friends, is all I ask of you," she said boldly. "You are many, and I am one. Listen then, for yet a little while, to a voice that but yesterday could command, and found none to gainsay it."

She paused, looking steadfastly upon the faces of those who hearkened to her, and then went on: "I am going to do that for which you should thank me, Lucy Denzil, you and your sister; and for which the thanks of your brother, Captain Jasper, are doubly due. My self-sacrifice merely rids your home of my presence; but him it saves from being linked to a wife who would bring him but a dowry of contempt. Yes; the usurping cuckoo is going to leave the nest to its rightful occupants. Helena, Lady Harrogate, tosses aside her tinsel

coronet. Miss Willis, the interesting Indian orphan, abdicates. Do you care to know the true name of the girl who has come so near to a successful imposture? It is RUTH HOLD. The pirate fellow—the seafaring adventurer whose connection with myself and my schemes has been a source of speculation to you all—is simply my brother Richard.

“Whether Richard or I deserved the dubious honour of having originated the idea that I should impersonate the lost child of Clare, Lady Harrogate, matters little. We were both poor and both unscrupulous, and in some respects alike. But mine were the better brains; and he it is who has wrecked the ship, after I had weathered storm and shoal.—Are you curious, Captain Denzil,

about the former home of her who was to have been your bride? It must not be sought, as you once supposed, among the spreading peepul trees and verandah-shaded bungalows of some cantonment in Bengal. But in Jull Street, Tunbridge Wells, within a stone's throw of the Parade, stands a little circulating library and stationer's shop, over which may yet be read in faded letters the name of Hold. Our father and our widowed mother, and our grandfather in earlier days, kept that shop. Dick and I were born there. Our parents were good God-fearing people. My father, it may be, was a little harsh towards unruly children, as was thought right long ago, when discipline was sterner. At any rate Brother Richard ran away and went to sea. He came back the year my

father died, and then went off again. His was a roving nature, and what he became you can see for yourselves. What I became you have yet to hear. I was well taught. My mother, poor soul! pinched herself to give me, as she said, the education of a lady. Quick and shrewd, I profited well by what lessons could be afforded me. As for reading, did I not devour the stores of erudition that lay within my reach, until I think there could not have been a single book upon the shelves which I had not perused once at least. I grew up wayward, intelligent, and discontented, a rebel against a social system in which there seemed to be no place for me. Honest work, humble living, duty—these things were repugnant to my restless soul, which pined and craved for power, for

distinction, for a sphere quite other than that in which the circumstances of my birth had placed me. And then, shortly after my mother's death had removed the last tie which bound me to the sober, workaday life of narrow fortunes and contracted habits, against which my instincts rose in revolt, my brother Richard came back again from sea. He was a middle-aged man now—he was older than me by many years—seemed to have some command of money, and called himself Captain. I think he had grown tired of ranging leagues upon leagues of salt water in search of the wealth which is greedily competed for even under the fiery skies of those tropical countries where half his life had been spent, and that he was disposed to batten on prey nearer home.

He went and came, and presently gave me to understand that a man of title and property, Sir Sykes Denzil, was under his thumb, and could deny him nothing ; and that if I would but play my allotted part and play it well, we could finish our lives in the midst of the luxurious surroundings which we both coveted.

“I fully understood, although Richard never entered into details, that his was the hand that had robbed Clare de Vere, Baroness Harrogate, of her child—hired to do that wickedness by the gold of Sir Sykes, who”——

“No, no ; I forbid you to speak of my father thus,” said Lucy Denzil, crimson with honest shame and anger, and stepping forward. “He may have been a dupe,

but never, never"—— She broke down, sobbing.

Ruth laughed a cruel little laugh. "You are a model of filial piety, Miss Denzil," she said scornfully. "How reconcile, then, your belief in your father's innocence with the fact of his having been a puppet in our hands from the first—in ours, and in those of sleek Mr. Wilkins there? When he took me in here among you as the orphan child of the imaginary Major Willis—when he insisted that your brother should marry me—when he reluctantly declared me a peeress in my own right, he gave such proofs of the guilt which made him our slave, as, before any earthly tribunal, would convict him.

"Mr. Wilkins played a little game parallel

to, but not connected with, ours. He had a knowledge which no honest man could have had"——

"Upon my word, young lady, your language may cost you more than you are aware of!" exclaimed Mr. Wilkins, livid with rage, as he pulled out pencil and pocket-book, and made a show of writing down Ruth's words. "There is a law of libel in England."

"Yes," returned Ruth fearlessly, "and a Chancellor who can strike off the Rolls a name so infamous as that of Enoch Wilkins is likely to be. Does any sane man believe that, were you not an accomplice who had to be humoured, Sir Sykes would have been weak enough to have"——

"I was no accomplice," interrupted the

lawyer, growing pale and red by turns. "Whatever I did was done professionally and in a regular manner. All that could be said against my conduct as a practitioner resolves itself into a mere question of delicacy. Mr. Gray—I really believed his name to be Gray, when first he consulted me in St. Nicholas Poultney—turned out, when next we met, after a lapse of years, to be a more valuable client than I had originally conjectured, that is all. I was aware of an episode in his past life which he seemed anxious to conceal; and this no doubt had weight with him when he reposed in me a confidence which I have not abused. That I have made enemies here, I know. That parasites accustomed to fatten on the estate wish me ill because I brushed them aside, I

am well aware. But I challenge any practised accountant to examine my books, and prove that I have wronged Sir Sykes of a sixpence. And as for the story of a stolen child, until that fellow Hold came to my office and talked wildly there, I had no notion that Sir Sykes had been concerned in actual crime."

"That fellow Hold," said a deep fierce voice, "is here to answer for himself; and you, Lawyer Wilkins, if you care to sleep to-night with whole bones, had better respect his name when you mention it." And the dark scowling visage of Richard Hold, master-mariner, became apparent among the white wondering faces gathered there.

CHAPTER XIV.

ADrift UPON THE WORLD.

"You'll pack your traps, my dear, and we'll be off," said Daredevil Dick with a cool nod, and addressing himself to his sister.

"You have come quickly," said Ruth, looking at Hold's bronzed countenance with an expression of anything but affection. "To be put in the pillory, as we both are, perhaps suits you."

"To be put in the pillory," answered Richard with perfect composure, "requires somebody with pluck enough to bell the cat, and I'm very much mistaken if such

will be found here. I met your messenger, my girl, on my road to Carbery. I'd heard before that the murder was out—the lost one found. When there's a real Helena, Lady Harrogate, up at High Tor, it's time for the pinchbeck one to give way before the sterling gold."

"You knew, then, that this governess, this Ethel Gray was the true heiress!" cried Ruth, with flaming eyes. "Brother, brother, you are a greater villain than even I took you for!"

There was a murmur among the audience, and cries of "Down with him!" "Secure him!" were raised by some of those in the background.

Hold turned his unabashed face towards the malcontents. "Any cowardly curs," he

said contemptuously, "can rabble and mob a stag at bay. Yelp, you hounds, as ye please, but don't, if you value a sound skin, test Dick Hold's patience too far! I have come to fetch away my sister. You are rid of us on cheap terms. But if you dare to stretch so much as a finger towards her or me, I'll teach the man who does it a lesson that will last him his life, or a little longer, maybe!"

There was a hush and a shrinking back on the part of the by-standers. Hold was evidently very much in earnest, and none cared to provoke the desperado to an outbreak of wrath which might have a tragical ending.

"Get your kit ready, Ruth, and we'll be going," said Hold imperatively.

For some minutes past it had been growing perceptibly darker, as a wrack of sable clouds came crawling seawards before the moorland breeze. As the buccaneer ceased speaking, a broad bright flash glanced athwart the emblazoned window, and presently boomed out the deep roar of the thunder. Such as he was, Hold's unfaltering courage made him, even at that pass, master of the situation. His sister, in obedience to his commands, left the room to prepare for her departure, and in a short time returned in travelling attire, with a rain-cloak thrown over her arm.

"I have locked my trunks," she said, in a low voice, "but whether"——

"Ah, I'll see to that," responded Hold roughly.—"See, some of you, that the girl's

luggage is sent over to *The Traveller's Rest*. She has lost a goodish deal—this fine house, among other things; but she ought to have her finery and fal-lals, so I will thank whoever walks quarter-deck here to attend to it.”

So many eyes were turned towards Jasper Denzil, that he found it easier to speak, since speech was required of him, than to be silent. He stepped forward. “This has been a most unfortunate business, in fact an awkward business,” he said, feebly stroking his moustache. “The governor’s precarious state of health”——

“Keeps the governor,” bluntly interrupted Hold, “out of as pretty a pickle as a baronet needs to get into. Why do you put in your oar, Captain Denzil? It’s

pretty well understood that things were squared with you to make you marry Ruth here. Now you cry 'off;' and I don't blame you. You're not going to come out generous, surely, and volunteer to be spliced, all the same?"

"No; I don't say that," replied the ex-captain of Lancers, recoiling.

"Then don't say anything," was Hold's gruff rejoinder, as, drawing his sister's arm through his own, he walked from the room and from the house, checking, by the cool fearlessness of his defiant manner, the insulting murmurs of Sir Sykes's servants. It was long remembered afterwards that, as Richard and Ruth were in the act of stepping across the threshold, a dazzling flash of lightning was succeeded by so portentous a

peal of thunder, that, throughout the ancient mansion, door and casement and wainscot rattled and quivered, and the vaulted roof gave back the sullen sound in deep resonance. Ruth instinctively shrank back ; but her brother stood firm, and drew, almost dragged her onwards into the rage of the tempest.

There were those who ran to door and window to watch, with a curiosity that in some cases did not quite exclude a sort of sympathy, these two outcasts making their way through the pelting pitiless rain, across the park. On they went, the very heavens seeming to frown upon them, lashed by the rain and hail, blinded by the bewildering lightning, deafened by the bellowing thunder, and buffeted by the gusts that swept down from the uplands of Dartmoor, sway-

ing to and fro the stately oaks of the grand avenue.

Hold and his sister reached the north wall of the park, passed through the gate that was ever open, and found themselves clear of the demesne, and in the wild and broken country beyond. Till then, Ruth had not spoken a word. At intervals as they crossed the park, a heavy sob had burst from her, but that was all.

“See, see!” she said suddenly, “to what your drunken folly and stiff-necked obstinacy have brought us! Was it thus that I should have quitted Carbery, I, whose will was law there but yesterday!”

“I’ll tell you one thing, Missy,” returned Hold with the grin and somewhat of the growl of a bull-dog; “men like me are not

much used, in a general way, to put up with hard words and name-calling and so forth from the women that belong to them, whether wife or sister. I've humoured you, my dear, as if you were a lady, because I thought you'd be one; but now you'd better keep your tongue quiet, d'ye hear? I may quarrel, if you don't."

Ruth turned upon him with a feverish fierceness, the very petulance of which excluded fear.

"You can't terrify *me*," she said shrilly. "Keep your ruffian threats for the drudges who cower before them; but clenched fists and kicks and buffets will not wring obedience from little Ruth Hold. Brother Dick, you are a dolt as well as a scoundrel, or we should not be here!"

For all answer, the man grasped her arm hard enough for her soft flesh to wince under the pressure of his powerful hand, gave her a rough shake, and urged her forwards brusquely but not unkindly.

"You've but one friend, Missy; don't try his temper overmuch," said Hold, as he would have spoken to a fractious child. "No use crying over spilt milk, my dear."

Nevertheless, Ruth did cry over the milk that had been, metaphorically, much spilt, moaning and wailing and sobbing in a storm of half-hysterical grief that deadened her perception of the elemental war around her. The girl hardly knew that she was wet, that the drenched hair which had escaped from her bedraggled hat hung loosely over her face, hardly saw the levin flash or heard the

roll of the thunder. Her own sorrow absorbed [all her faculties; and indeed the calamity which had befallen her was very great. There had been a few triumphant days and weeks during which the glittering prize of rank, power, almost boundless wealth, had seemed to lie within the hollow of her hand.

All was over now. Cast out, Ruth was leaving, in disgrace and despair, the mansion of which she was to have been the legitimate mistress, and where she had of late queened it in borrowed splendour. But yesterday she assumed the style and received the treatment of a lady of high degree, and then came the bursting of the bubble, the exposure, the confession, and the snapping of the ties that had bound her to

those whose birthright was the station which she had usurped. Henceforth she was cut off from the society of those who had hitherto owned her as an equal. Henceforth she was a detected impostor, cast away, as a leper in old times, by her late associates. She must herd now with the coarse and the vile, must get her bread how she could, must sink down, down, down into abysses of degradation that yawned grimly before her.

Hold, his first irritable outburst over, was not unkind in his behaviour towards the wayward girl, whose passionate sorrow he judiciously allowed to have its swing. He had a sort of dim sympathy with her unhappiness, recognising that whereas with him the failure of the plot was but a pounds, shillings, and pence question, to Ruth it was

much more. But he did not speak, and indeed he had need of all his senses to keep to the right track, full in the teeth of that raging storm, through which it was necessary to struggle to reach the ill-reputed inn which was his residence.

"Come, 'come, lass!" said Hold at length, with an awkward effort to speak soothingly, as he caught sight, by the glare of the lightning, of the tumble-down roof and rickety sign of *The Traveller's Rest*. "Here we are, close to port. For to-night anyhow, we must make shift here. To-morrow"—

"To-morrow!" interrupted Ruth, with a wild laugh. "What am I, or what has life to offer me, that I should care where my wretched head may lie to-morrow?"

"It won't be so bad. I'll see you are

made comfortable," urged Hold, putting his hand upon her wrist to lead her forward. "Anyhow, there's shelter here for a night. To-morrow we can be off; to London first; then, if you like, home."

"Home!" echoed the girl, with a mocking laugh.

"Ay, down to Kent," said Hold, misunderstanding her. "Try, if you can, to make a living out of the old shop. It's going before the mast—I know that well enough—after being berthed in the state cabin; but still it's your best plan. Before I go to sea again, I'll share with you the yellow-boys that jingle yet in my purse, I will indeed, to the last stiver, and then"——

"There's the captain," squeaked out a boyish voice, as under the rotten porch of

The Traveller's Rest there appeared the strippling figure of the treacherous Deputy, pointing with outstretched finger at the advancing guest. Who were those to whom he spoke? Helmets, bright buttons, and dark-blue uniforms were a sufficient evidence to their calling.

"Your name Richard Hold? In the Queen's name, then!" exclaimed the foremost of the group, hurrying forward, but only to be felled to the earth, like an ox beneath the pole-axe of the butcher, by one blow of the buccaneer's heavy fist. The second, who wore plain clothes, and was indeed no other than Inspector Drew, passed on undaunted, and caught Daredevil Dick by the collar just as the seaman turned towards his sister.

“Run, Ruth, run!” cried Hold, grappling with this new antagonist. “I’ll follow as soon as I’ve”—— And as he spoke he succeeded in getting one hand into the inner breast-pocket of the short rough coat he wore, and in drawing from it a revolver. Then there were more wrestling and trampling to and fro, and a short sharp struggle for the weapon, and then two rapid reports. Then there was a groan and a crashing fall.

“Not hurt, I hope?” exclaimed the chief officer of the county police present, who with two of his men had darted forward to lend their aid in the contest.

“Only a graze not worth speaking of,” answered the inspector, shaking off the drops of fresh blood that trickled from a scratch

across his right wrist. "The second shot has taken effect, fatally so, I fear, in his own body. We had better carry him in."

"But where is the young woman?" asked another of the police, looking round. For Ruth had disappeared.

CHAPTER XV.

LOST.

WINGED by terror, nerved by the formless dread that gave speed to her feet, to exertions of which she had not known herself to be capable, and scarcely aware whither she bent her steps, Ruth fled from *The Traveller's Rest* into the blackness of the night. She heard the sound of the pistol-shots, but did not for a moment slacken the rapid pace at which she had started. Leaving the road and turning her face from human habitations and the haunts of men she struck desperately, like some hunted animal, across that wild and solitary moor.

The storm yet raged ; the granitic Tors of the Dartmoor range that loomed ahead re-echoed the frequent crash of the deep-voiced thunder, and ever and anon some flash of more than common brilliancy illuminated all the surface of the moor, the dull brown of the faded heather, the gray stones and dusky peat-hags and ragged clumps of broom, leaving the desolate expanse all the darker and less inviting the instant after, by its sudden contrast with the murky gloom that prevailed. The rain beat heavily on Ruth's undefended form, and the shrieking wind howled and moaned around her like wolves impatient for their prey ; but she heeded the rain and wind no more than a hunted hare would have done ; or if she gave a thought to the weather, it was with a strange sense

of satisfaction that she remembered that it might serve to mask her flight and facilitate her escape.

Escape! That was the one thought uppermost with her, the one ray of light that broke in upon her clouded mind. Yes, she must escape. She had lost all, riches and rank and pomp. Her lot no longer lay with the wearers of purple and fine linen. To rest on a soft couch, and feed daintily, and glitter and shine and sparkle among the gold-powdered butterflies of Fashion, these things were not for the sister and accomplice of such a one as Richard Hold. But to escape actual punishment for her misdeeds, to elude the halting step with which Nemesis stalks down the evil-doer, this at any rate she was resolved to do.

During all her plots and schemes, her double-dealing and deception, the idea of punishment, of actual duress of the law, had never once flitted before the mind of Ruth Hold as regarded herself. That her reckless brother would come to be hanged she had often said, and sometimes thought. But as concerned herself, who never went armed, had no perilous habit of pugnacity, and avoided the ruder forms of crime, she had been unused to apprehend any worse evil than that of the break-down of a promising project.

Now the long-expected blow had fallen, and the smart of it had been harder to bear than Ruth had pictured it to be ; and as if penury and disgrace were not enough, the foiled conspirators had found themselves

within the clutch of the law. The pistol-shots still rang in her ears as she hurried on. How often had she remonstrated with Richard about his semi-savage Californian custom of going armed. Those loaded Derringers that he persisted in carrying in his pocket, how often had she told him that these presented too strong a temptation to one whose brains, naturally shrewd, were always on fire with drink. He had done murder, and now the country would rise, and he and she would be hunted down like wolves.

That her brother had come victorious out of the contest she never doubted. Had she not been accustomed from her childhood to hear stories of his wonderful escapes and constant broils in the far-off tropics ! What

she feared was the being thrust at his side behind the spiked partition of the dock at the assize court, to hear the indictment read out in dry rapid tones by the Clerk of Arraighs, and to be described, stared at, and sentenced as 'the female prisoner at the bar.' To keep herself free from prison with all its humiliations, free from the searching, the hair-cropping, the hideous garb, the whitewashed cell, the oakum to pick, the gruel ration, was her object now.

As she sped along, somewhat of a plan began to shape itself vaguely in her fevered mind. Her first aim was to distance the pursuers. To do that, she must double and twist as the hare before the hounds, and leave no trace behind her. She would push on, and on, and on! At last, no doubt a

high-road would be reached, and a village, and there she could find means of transport to some town. She would not go back to London or to Kent, because it was in London and in Kent that her enemies would await her. No ; she would make her way westward, to Plymouth, to Cornwall, to South Wales perhaps, and there lie hidden.

She was not helpless, not without means. There was money about her person, not indeed enough to live upon for any length of time ; but more than enough for current expenses—about, as she reckoned, seventy pounds. Sir Sykes had written her a cheque for a hundred, two days before his seizure, and she had that much left in notes and gold. She had jewels too, and some

of them were of value, gifts made to her during her brief season of prosperity, and these she could sell ; but she was aware that the gems could only be disposed of in some great city. Time enough to think of this resource when London itself should be reached.

The future lay dark before her ; but she was young, and could hope. Let her once escape the ignominy of chastisement, keep outside the jail doors, and surely some career must lie open before her. She was educated. She was clever. As a teacher, an actress, a servant if need were, she could earn her bread, and set her foot once more upon the ladder of life. Her prospects seemed to her all the brighter because her brother was no longer her companion. What but ruin

could come from an association with a desperado such as Dick Hold !

How the moorland gale blew, staggering her as she walked ! The thunder growled yet, but with less of fury than before, and the flashes were fewer ; but the wind and the rain were mighty in their swoop, and the night was dark and starless, so that she could scarcely see the rough uneven path which she trod. She had changed her course more than once, and there was nothing but the remembrance from which quarter the wind blew, to guide her steps, and prevent her from wandering back to the vicinity of *The Traveller's Rest*. She had walked, so she calculated, several miles, since her flight began, and had given the slip, so far, to the police.

Were those voices calling to her from

behind ? Ah, no ; the sound was but produced by the creaking of the willow-boughs, the leafless wands and twigs of which she saw waving like the fleshless arms of half-buried skeletons. Ruth was traversing a hollow, nestling between two ridges of the uneven moor, and through which there ran brawling a thread of water, now swollen with rain. But the huge stepping-stones made the passage of this brooklet easy, and the storm-beaten wayfarer pressed on, and gained the drier ground beyond. A dreary prospect it was that lay before her. Darkness, more and more rarely broken by the now distant lightning, brooded over the far-stretching surface of the moor. The wind was less violent, but the rain still fell heavily.

A. long way off, a faint light, obviously

proceeding from the window of some human habitation, was visible. To Ruth Hold, alone in the wilderness, cut off as it seemed from the great communion of mankind, this light was as welcome as is the ray from a harbour-beacon to the storm-beaten mariner. Perhaps it shone from the window of some farmhouse, or it might be of one of those isolated cottages that here and there studded the rough outskirts of the moor. In either case she could, when she gained its shelter, find a peat-fire whereat she might dry her wet hair and dripping clothes, and a guide to the nearest village that lay on a frequented road. Of rest and sleep she must not think for hours yet to come.

To reach the upland where the light beamed forth into the shadows of the night

it was necessary that Ruth should quit the hard and firm, if rugged track which she had hitherto followed, and strike into another and much narrower path, less distinctly marked, and in places scarcely to be traced. Presently the wanderer became conscious that the ground on which she trod was wet and yielding; those were the spongy hummocks of a swamp over which she now passed, while at every step ink-black water started forth from the peaty soil. Still on she went towards the lighted window that seemed to beckon to her from afar. Were those boughs waving in the wind? No; but tall reed-beds, the browned stalks swaying under the impact of the gale. She was glad now to avail herself of the great lichen-incrusted stones which at intervals dotted

the path, and which yielded dry footing for a pace or two, though even when supported by them she felt the earth quiver beneath her feet.

The storm was dying away in the distance, but one ruddy gleam on the far horizon lit up for an instant the whole desolate tract, and showed waving reed-banks, and black pools of water draped in places with floating weed-masses, and moss, and piles of brown peat ready dug and stacked to be carted away, and tangles of rushes, rank grass, and feathery wild-flax close at hand. Farther on the ridges of heather-clad moorland rolled upwards towards the lofty spot, no longer visible, where the light burned so invitingly in the window of some human dwelling.

The darkness, which seemed to swallow up the whole wide landscape as rapidly as the evanescent gleam of the lightning had illumined it, once more brooded over the earth, like some primeval monster, when Ruth resumed her route. The quagmire trembled more and more beneath her feet as she pushed on. Yet no sensation of alarm assailed her. It was men's enmity that she dreaded, with all its consequences of disgrace, shame, ruin. The fear of being arrested and lodged in prison was ever present to her as she pressed on, until, on a sudden, the treacherous crust of earth gave way beneath her weight, and down she sank with sullen plunge, and cry unheard by mortal ear, into the slimy bog.

From the first moment, Ruth knew that

she was lost, that her struggling and efforts could but sink her the deeper in the tenacious mud and foul black water, the gases from which poured forth in suffocating streams, now that the unknown depths of the swamp had been disturbed. Yet she struggled and screamed for human help, and uttered one wild cry to heaven for pity and for pardon ! Then felt she as though some dreadful creature, hidden in the slime, had grasped her by the feet, and was dragging her down, slowly and surely down, deeper and deeper yet. She shrieked for aid a second time and a third, and then there was silence.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONFESSION.

“THIS is the full and true confession of me, Richard Hold, made without hope of reward, for what could all the gold you could give me profit me now, as I lie here, a dying man! I owe you no grudge, Inspector Drew, not I,” continued Hold, stirring uneasily on his pillow. “I meant to give you a Kentucky pill, I did, in the way of business, and you knocked up the pistol in the way of business too, spry enough. I always did say, in spite of the talk about hemp and halters and ropes reeved at the yard-arm,

that I shouldn't come to die in my boots, all said and done."

The notion of having cheated the gallows seemed to yield an odd sort of comfort to Richard Hold, master-mariner, as he lay in his bed at *The Traveller's Rest* with blanched face and shrunken veins, and felt his sands of life slide away into the lower half of Time's grim hour-glass. Those present were, first the doctor, who had been hurriedly summoned to do his best for a wounded man, and who could do nothing, the case being one of that inward bleeding to death from a gun-shot hurt against which science is powerless; secondly, the superintendent of county police; and thirdly, Inspector Drew.

Hold had been well cared for since the

moment when he was picked up, mortally wounded by the second shot he had himself fired with design to rid himself of his foe. His foe had become his nurse, and had got him to bed, and given him sips of cordial at judicious intervals, and stanchd the blood that trickled from the ugly little blue spot where the ball had entered, until the surgeon came. The surgeon, who had been summoned as a healer, remained as a witness to the confession which Hold, *in extremis*, professed his willingness to dictate, and which Inspector Drew, who was a ready penman, took down as his parched lips uttered it.

"A wild lad always," resumed Hold, "and getting but harsh usage at home, I ran away and went to sea. And finding I was knocked about on board the colliers and

coasting-craft that first I shipped in, I signed articles for a long voyage, deserted, was tempted to go before the mast in an American ship, was beaten to a jelly, and again deserted, by jumping overboard in the middle watch, and swimming two miles or more, in a rough sea, off the Dardanelles. The British consul sent me home as a distressed British subject ; and there I was, footing it on the dusty London road from Southampton, with one-and-threepence in my pocket, all told.

“Then somewhere and somehow, I heard from tramps like myself of races to be run, not so many miles away — horse-races I mean—and I thought I’d pick up a trifle there, where so many rich fools with money burning in their pockets were gathered together, by fair means or foul. I’m no

thief, mark me, not I; but for nobbling a race-horse or backing a thimble-rigger or fisting it against some gipsy youngster in a scratch prize-fight, for anything like that I was ready. Well! my one-and-threepence had melted itself into bread and cheese and ale before I got to the course, on the grand day, and I had no chance of a meal, without I could work or beg or steal the pewter to pay for it. With some reluctance I made up my mind, for the first time in all my life, to beg.

“The person I chose to beg from was a grand-looking gentleman, on a good horse, riding all alone, with a thoughtful look, in a lane on the edge of the downs where the race was to be run. He was kind enough, first words I said, after a look at my hungry

young face, to toss me a shilling. Then just as he had ridden nearly out of sight, he wheels his horse sharp round, and rides back again. 'My lad,' says he, 'you're not, unless I'm much mistaken, one of the regular hangers-on at races. A sailor ashore, I should say?'

"Then I up and told the gentleman as much of my history as I cared to tell. I told him, true enough, that I'd slipped overboard from the *Empire State's* bow-port, opposite the Turkish fort they call the Castle of Europe, and swum against wave and current, till I dropped dead spent on the white pebbles, amongst the fishing-nets on the beach. I showed him—you may see it yet—the triangular scar I got from the chief-mate's brass knuckleduster the day before I

deserted. And he believed my tale, seeing me to be a lean, sunburnt, big-boned strippling, as I was then.

“The gentleman spoke me fair, very kind and generous he spoke, giving me a trifle of money, with promise of help to reach London; and more than that, if I'd keep sober and out of mischief and queer company, and meet him at a roadside public not far distant, after the race. He didn't tell me his name, but he did say that he felt some interest in me, and would be willing to employ me profitably if I cared to earn a pound or two honestly.

“Well! I stayed sober, kept clear of the low gambling booths and prick-the-garter tables—the proprietors of more than one of which, seeing me a resolute-looking lad and

strongly put together, would have taken me on as a 'bonnet' at seven-and-six and my liquor, in case of a row—and saw the race run as gravely as if I had been one of the stewards. Then I kept my appointment at the road-side public. So did my gentleman on the horse. He was—though he didn't, you may be sure, tell me so—Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet, a deal younger then, of course, than he is nowadays. He had a job, he said, for me.

“The job was to steal a child. He wouldn't tell me why he wanted it done, nor whose it was, nor what was to become of it, but only that I was to convey the child carefully to a place of his choosing, and there to receive the stipulated recompense. He bid very fairly, handsomely I may say,

for my services, and told me to remark that though the deed seemed to be a risky one, all the risk was over when once I had got clear off from immediate pursuit and discovery. A roving sailor like myself, here to-day and gone to-morrow, stood little chance of being called to account for such an act later on.

“I make no doubt that Sir Sykes chose me because he thought me certain to go ranging off again to the other side of the world and where not, and be lost sight of, and perhaps die thousands of miles away from England, by a dry death or a wet one, as might be. I agreed to his terms. There were few things I would not have agreed to just then, to put money in my pocket. To go home to Tunbridge Wells and show

myself ~~enclosed~~ ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~some~~ ~~in~~
 be crowded over him ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~
 relief given to me in a ~~very~~ ~~small~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~
 starving dog, that was that I ~~could~~ ~~not~~ ~~have~~
 the idea of being ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 more than once in my ~~present~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 could keep myself ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 my present ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 the ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~

"Now, when the ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 which he ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 nature of the work for which I was ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 I wasn't ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 of the ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 away with the ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 with his terms, ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 I never could (as some men do, in ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~
 trouble) do a hurt to ~~intended~~ ~~in~~ ~~any~~ ~~more~~

for my services, and told me to remark that though the deed seemed to be a risky one, all the risk was over when once I had got clear off from immediate pursuit and discovery. A roving sailor like myself, here to-day and gone to-morrow, stood little chance of being called to account for such an act later on.

“I make no doubt that Sir Sykes chose me because he thought me certain to go ranging off again to the other side of the world and where not, and be lost sight of, and perhaps die thousands of miles away from England, by a dry death or a wet one, as might be. I agreed to his terms. There were few things I would not have agreed to just then, to put money in my pocket. To go home to Tunbridge Wells and show

myself ragged, famished, and shoeless, and be crowed over and browbeaten, and have relief given to me as a bone is flung to a starving dog, that was what I couldn't bear the idea of being driven to. I had boasted more than once in my letters home that I could keep myself now, and did not care, by my present miserable plight, to give myself the lie.

"Now, when the gentleman first set forth, which he did in a roundabout way, the nature of the work for which I was wanted, I wasn't shocked, not I, by the wickedness of the deed. If he had asked me to make away with the child, I'd not have closed with his terms, shipmate, believe me in that. I never could (as some men do, to save trouble) do a hurt to little creatures like

that, black or tawny, let alone white. I was hard up and desperate, and I agreed. Then came a journey and a fresh meeting with my gentleman on the banks of the Thames, high up in a pretty part of the river, where anglers and sketchers were often to be seen.

“By this time I was rigged out anew in decent clothes as a sort of fresh-water sailor, like some of the blue-jackets I saw managing the punts, and taking out fishing-parties along with 'em in their flat-bottomed craft, and giving themselves airs, bless us, like commodores! Often I wished it would blow a capful, to test the metal these horse-marine fellows were made of; but that's neither here nor there. A boat was hired, and in it I was from dawn to dark poking

about, till I got to know every reach and creek and weir along the river a'most as well as if I'd been born upon its banks.

“There was a house all over jessamine and climbing noisette roses, such as we have in Kent, a gentlefolks' cottage as it's called, with a garden and a grass terrace skirting the stream, and this house I watched as a cat watches outside a mouse-hole, by my employer's orders. Of course I wasn't so green as to let it be seen what I was about ; a spied spy is of no more good than a cartridge that's been fired. Always I pretended to be busy sniggling for eels or trolling for jack, or ground-baiting some barbel-pitch or roach-swim for the benefit of the anglers that never came, or spooning up the glittering minnows that

darted about like live silver on the pebbly shoal.

“Of course too I wasn’t long in learning whose home it was about which I was prowling, as I’ve known, in Cuba and Mexico, the mountain-cat to prowl for the chance of fowl or lamb or defenceless thing of any sort straying beyond the hedge of prickly-pear. Clare, Lady Harrogate, a young widow, in her own right a peeress of England, that was what they called her. Poor young thing! A beautiful creature she was; and more than once my heart, which wasn’t quite a stone, smote me, as I saw her moving about in the garden, always so lovingly, with the child I was to steal.

“I did my cruel work and earned my hire. In the afternoon of the fourth day it

was when from the stern-sheets of my boat I saw the Lady Clare, who had been on the grass terrace overlooking the river, turn and go in, after a servant had come out of the house and spoken to her, leaving the child alone. Then I never hesitated. Here was the chance I'd waited and wished for, and as luck would have it, the river was as clear as I've seen the Straits of Magellan to be—not so much as a Cockney hauling up a gudgeon.

“I snatched the sculls and rowed in, and one spring brought me to the top of the bank. In an instant I had the child in my arms, and before you could say Jack Robinson I was pulling away for the dear life, with the little creature stowed away under my monkey jacket atween thwarts, until I

ran the boat into the big reed-bed not far down stream, poled and pushed through it, and got into a creek, screened from the opposite bank of the river, where I could land unseen. Not far off, as I knew, was what they called the Old Mill, a ruinous place—in Chancery, I believe—that was never lived in since the last miller did away with himself there.

“She had called out loud enough, the little frightened creature, when first I pounced upon her; but somehow with the hurry and scrambling and my rough ways, she seemed too much alarmed to scream again, only sobbed. I carried her in my arms up to the black ruined mill, kicked open the crazy door with one thrust of my foot, and set the child down on the lee-side

of a pile of rotting fagots, almost hidden by the grass and nettles that grew rankly there. Then I reclosed the door, went back to my boat, and rowing as leisurely as you please, took the bit of hollow timber into the main river, and left it in the boathouse of the chap it belonged to. Then I paid my score at the *Angler's Joy* where I had lodged, made up my bundle, and set off to tramp, as all believed, to London. After two miles of it, I left the road, and across fields, made my way to the Old Mill again, where I had left the child.

“I never shall forget how I felt as I drew near to that Old Mill. By that time, mind ye, the search was hot, and I could hear shouting voices all along the river-bank, where men were busy, some dragging the

river, some seeking in every corner and weed-bed and drift-heap for the chance of the dead child having been washed there by the down-set of the current. Of course 'twas drowning they all had in mind, and so far so good. But somebody might by accident have chanced upon the mill, or the child might have strayed out of it, and"—Here Hold's voice failed him, and his pallor increased, while his hands began to twitch nervously at the bed-clothes. The vigilant inspector, mindful of the probable import of these signs, made haste to adjust the pillow more conveniently beneath the head of the wounded man, and to administer brandy-and-water, while the doctor rose from his chair to feel the sufferer's pulse.

"It is scarcely perceptible," said the

surgeon, as he went back to his seat; but low as was his tone, the anxious ear of the patient caught the sense of his words.

“Running aground, eh, doctor?” said Hold, with a ghastly smile. “Well, you’re right. Give me a sup more of the comforter, mate, will ye, and I’ll try to finish the yarn before turning in. It’s short now.”

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH RICHARD HOLD'S HISTORY IS COMPLETED.

“To my surprise, I found the little lass lying there asleep, with her pretty head pillowed on one tiny arm, and the tear-marks fresh on her sweet little face. She had sobbed herself to sleep, most-like ; and as I looked down upon her, I felt myself a precious villain for the job I was engaged in. But no play, no pay ! So I hardened my heart, and took her up, and wrapped her in a dark common sort of shawl I had provided, and strode off out of the Old Mill,

carrying her in my arms and hushing her as best I might, when she awoke and cried out, as she did, to 'Mamma, mamma !' for help, since my strange sunburnt face frightened her.

"By field-paths and by-lanes, any way that seemed unfrequented, I managed to get along and strike the Birmingham road, seven miles away ; and there I got a lift of four miles for a shilling, in a carrier's cart. By this time the child was stupefied with terror and weariness, and only sobbed a little, and I said she was my little sister ; and folks believed me, or if they didn't, thought it was no concern of theirs, so long as I paid my way.

"Before night I got to a railway station, and in the afternoon I reached Sandston, a

sea-side place on the east coast where I had appointed to meet my gentleman, and where I did meet him and gave over the stolen child into his hands. He had written in pencil the name of the place on a card he took out of his pocket, and tore in two when we parted on the towing-path beside the Thames ; and sure enough he met me, received the child from me, and paid me the promised reward.

“ ‘The sooner,’ says he, ‘you get afloat again, my lad, the better !’

“That he took the child with him to the *Dolphin*, the chief hotel in the town, I know. But I did not linger in Sandston, nor could I have done so without coming to loggerheads with my employer, who never was easy till he had seen me off by the train, booked for

London. From London I went home to Tunbridge Wells, and arriving there in respectable clothes and good case, got a more kindly greeting than often falls to the lot of the returned prodigal. Some of my gentleman's cash was still jingling in my pockets, and while it lasted, I paid for my board with the old folks and kept on at home.

“Well I mind me of the day when at Tunbridge Wells itself—*the* Wells, as we Kentishmen call them—I saw my gentleman again, sooner nor he expected. There was a grand funeral, with white scarfs and white ostrich feathers and all sorts of undertaker's frippery, for the burial of a poor little morsel of a child, the infant daughter—so the newspapers said—of Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet. Mere curiosity, as I loafed about in shore-

going clothes, made me mix with the crowd, and some one whom I knew pointed him out to me as the dead child's father, speaking also of his grandeur and riches, and how he rented one of the biggest villas at Calverley, and found it too tight a fit for his many servants.

"Sir Sykes never rested his eyes on me for a moment; while I for my part shipping afresh, for China next time, and staying seven or eight years at a stretch away from England, came very nigh to forgetting him. It was not until I'd been smartly wounded on the Guinea coast by a marine's bayonet, as we fought to keep the man-o'-war meddlers from grabbing our cargo of living ebony, that I came to think much of the Baronet. It became a sort of habit with me after a time,

when I returned from a voyage, to go down to Sandston, and have a peep at the child that Sir Sykes had left at nurse there, providing for her maintenance and giving her the name of Ruth Gray. I did not find it hard to screw out of the servants at the *Dolphin* as much information as let me know how Miss Gray lived first with Mrs. Linklater in a lodging-house; then with one Mrs. Keating, the wife of the parson of the parish; and at last took a berth as school-mistress at High Tor here.

“I had a sister, so much younger than me she might have passed for my daughter a'most, Ruth Hold—a quick, shrewd, young girl, wonderfully quick to learn; a scholar, and with the manners of a lady. Somehow—I think the Christian name being the same

as that which Sir Sykes had chosen for the stolen child first put it into my head—somehow the notion sprung up in my mind that it would be a smart bit of business to palm off Sister Ruth as the lost heiress, and trust to Sir Sykes's fears to back my assertion.

“My sister came into my plans easy enough. She was restless and ambitious, and took fire at the notion of becoming one of the grand folk, whose fine carriages and fine clothes and liveries and jewels and white-handed way of life she had learned to envy ever since she was a lisping little trot scarce able to spell out a sentence in one of the old novels that were plenty on our shelves, and one or other of which was seldom out of her hand when she got older. I told her as much of the business as it

concerned her to know, and let her guess the rest.

“Now faces do change after years and years of being knocked about the world, and yet it seems to me as if I never could forget the figurehead of anybody I'd as good a reason to remember as Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet, had to remember mine. For all that, 'tis a truth that when next we met and spoke together for the first time since our parting in Sandston railway station, Sir Sykes didn't know me. He didn't recognise in the middle-aged seaman the brown, lathy, gipsy-looking sailor-boy that he had bribed to be his cat's-paw and tool. But I had his secret; and a pretty life I led him.

“When, to please me—me, Dick Hold,

once a cabin-boy—Sir Sykes took my sister into his grand house, calling her Miss Willis, his ward, and the orphan daughter of a brother-officer, he fully thought he was receiving the stolen child, in her own right Lady Harrogate. Under that belief too, he bullied—always to please me, shipmate—his son Captain Jasper into agreeing for to marry Ruth. Then I turned the screw too tight. I would, no matter what my sister said to hold me back, have her married as Helena, Lady Harrogate. And that reminds — Give me another sip of grog, mate. I'm sinking fast."

Hold uttered the last words hastily, yet with a business-like coolness that did credit to his strength of nerve. The draught of brandy-and-water seemed to rally his forces

but feebly. "I would ask," he said in an altered voice when he spoke again, "that some gentleness be shown in dealing with my poor young sister. Let the sin lie heavy, if you will, on my grave; but don't let her have to suffer overly much for her share in the job. One word more, that may serve, as a dying man's deposition, to do some good, as to the true daughter of that young Lady Clare that I robbed of her only comfort.

"That Miss Gray from Sandston, late school-mistress of High Tor village school, is the real"—— He never spoke more. His strong jaw dropped, and there was a groan and a heaving sob of the deep chest, and almost without a struggle, Richard Hold, master-mariner, had gone to his account.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

SIR SYKES DENZIL, who for some eighteen months miserably vegetated in a condition of bodily helplessness and mental imbecility, yet lived long enough to be the survivor of his son and the last baronet of his race. The name of Sir Jasper was never destined to figure under the heading of 'Denzil, Bart.' in gilt-edged books of reference. The ex-captain of Lancers, receiving from Pounce and Pontifex, on whom now devolved the virtual management of the Carbery estate, what those steady-going family lawyers

regarded as a handsome allowance, retired to the congenial clime of Monaco, there to await the final snapping of the slender thread which bound his father to life.

Captain Denzil's heart beat high as he swaggered for the first time into those sumptuous *salons* presided over by M. Blanc, and flung his first handful of gold pieces upon the green cloth, and won and won again day after day and night after night, having one of those runs of luck which are as oases in the desert of a gambler's life. The captain was flushed with hope, in spite of the stinginess with which Pounce and Pontifex—into whose prudent hands the reins of government over the property had fallen since the retirement of Mr. Wilkins—had thought fit to treat the

heir-apparent. He had, to use his own turf phrase, 'scratched' his marriage. He was away from the melancholy old jail in Devonshire. It could but be a question of a few weeks or months, for Sir Sykes's state was hopeless; and then Sir Jasper, unfettered master of Carbery, would be received, though at a high figure, into ducal and noble partnership in those Amalgamated Stables of which envious or preternaturally knowing men upon the turf began to whisper evil forebodings.

But Captain Denzil's cup of joy was dashed from his lips before he could drain its sparkling contents. A Russian Prince, equally celebrated for his skill at cards and with the pistol, quarrelled with him over a disputed case of 'turning up the king' at

écarté, struck him, before twenty witnesses, at the Cercle Masséna at Nice, across the face with a kid glove ; and so, according to the ethics of the society in which both moved, forced on a duel. At the first fire Jasper was shot through the lungs, and dropped mortally wounded.

By the death of Sir Sykes, an event which happened shortly afterwards, Carbery Chase became the property of the baronet's two daughters. These two great heiresses, however, seem but little likely to marry, having already attained the reputation of confirmed old maids amongst their acquaintance, and expending most of their ample income in good works. It is whispered that it was on account of her unforgotten attachment to Lord Harrogate that Miss Blanche Denzil,

who was known to have refused two or three good offers, was Miss Blanche Denzil still. It is whispered also that there is every probability that Carbery Chase will lapse to its original owners, the De Veres, since Pounce and Pontifex are understood to have in safe keeping the wills by which the co-heiresses have bequeathed the property to the eldest son of him whom we will yet designate as Lord Harrogate.

The body of Ruth Willis, *alias* Hold, was discovered in a peat-moss adjoining the great morass of Bitternley Swamp, and was laid quietly to rest beside that of her brother, in High Tor churchyard. Betty Mudge is the notable wife of a small farmer, whose cowhouse and sheepfold were replenished through the dowry which the moorland

maiden received from the bounty of her friend and patroness. And for the Ladies Gladys, Maud, and Alice De Vere, are not their marriages chronicled by Dod and Debrett?

It only remains to speak of the present Earl and Countess of Wolverhampton, the happiest, brightest, best—so general fame avers—of all the married couples within a summer day's journey from High Tor. Their quiet wedding took place within a few months of the discovery of Helena's real birth; and it was not until the following summer that the House of Lords formally registered the right of the young peeress to her hereditary honours. Even to this day, the young Earl often calls his beautiful Countess 'Ethel,' the name by which he had

learned to love her ; while Betty Mudge has an incorrigible habit of addressing 'My Lady' as Miss Gray. The High Tor schools have long since been rebuilt, and an excellent mistress watches over the budding intelligence of the village children ; but perhaps there never will be known in that sequestered nook a teacher so beloved as had been Helena, Lady Harrogate.

THE END.



